MR. FORTUNE, PLEASE

H.C. BAILEY

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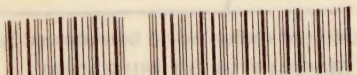

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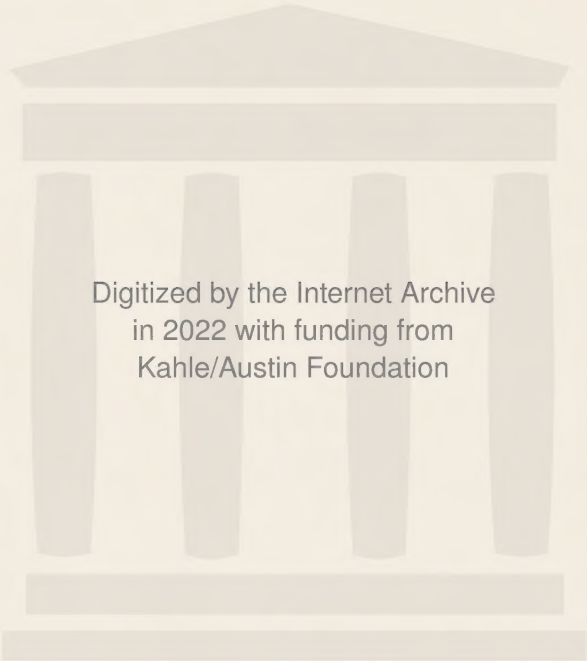
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MR. FORTUNE, PLEASE

C.I.D detective Sydney Lomas is discussing with Reggie Fortune, a slim grey suited figure with fair hair, the disappearance of a member of the local gentry.

The discussion is not concluded before a telephone message tells the two friends that the missing husband has been found on a hill near a copse of beech trees - dead.

This is the first of six mysteries that are solved by Reggie Fortune.

MR. FORTUNE, PLEASE

H. C. Bailey

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MR. FORTUNE, PLEASE

THE MISSING HUSBAND

IN an orchard where the apple-blossom rose out of a flood of bluebells a hammock was slung. In the hammock lay a creature the same size all the way along, like a worm, a worm wearing grey tweed and fair hair.

To this scene of peace entered with sprightly grace, like an actor-manager to his love scene, the Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department, the Hon. Sidney Lomas. He approached the hammock, he put up his eyeglass and gazed tenderly at the still body.

In it one blue eye opened. "Reginald, my dear fellow," said Lomas with affection, and patted him. "How goes it?"

Reggie Fortune squirmed, revealing a face of delicate complexion, and brushed back his tumbled hair. "Can aught atone?" he murmured. "Lomas, you have waked me up. That was my after-lunch sleep. And it isn't time for tea." He sighed deeply and looked at Lomas with large, reproachful eyes.

"You have no heart, Lomas. I believe you want me to work."

"Oh no. We're doing splendidly without you. There's nothing to do. I only came over to see how you were getting on."

"The patient is going on as well as can be expected, but cannot yet sleep more than twenty-four hours in the day."

Mr. Fortune was, in fact, recovering his strength after the blood-poisoning which he acquired in his work as medical expert for the Crown upon the historic crime of the abominable Armenian, Comnenus. For his convalescence that majestic woman novelist, Mrs. Hamilton Chapone, lent him her cottage on the Wessex downs and there you behold him living the simple life in beautiful isolation (with his own cook).

At tea in the sun lounge, which looks across five miles of smiling fields to the sea, he ate cream cakes pensively while Lomas dallied with an anchovy sandwich and explained how he came. The Chief Constable of Wessex had asked him for advice, so he combined business with pleasure, the chief constable with Reggie Fortune. Mr. Fortune looked at the empty plate, Mr. Fortune sucked cream from a finger and sighed. "Is there a constable in Wessex?" said Mr. Fortune dreamily. "Why?"

"He hasn't much to do or he wouldn't have

bothered me with this. A husband has left his wife, Reginald. That's all."

"In Wessex?" said Mr. Fortune. "Nasty fellow."

"I don't know the local rules, but it's not a crime."

"Depends on the wife. Who are they?"

"Mr. and Mrs. Julian Brase."

"Brase? One of our good old county families, what? Genuine antique, aren't they?"

"Oh, prehistoric. So's the estate. Julian Brase, heir of all the ages and a lot of land mortgaged up to the tree-tops, married an Australian heiress two years ago. She paid off the debts and they've been living down here putting the place to rights. The county didn't take to Mrs. Brase. They think she's rather free and a good deal too easy. Julian Brase is a limp fellow—the sort of stuff these old families finish in. A week ago the Brases were due to dine at the rectory. Mrs. Brase sent a note to say her husband was ill. The rector's wife called at Brase Hall next day with kind inquiries. Mrs. Brase was very short with her. Said he had gone to London on business. Brase has a brother somewhere near, ex-army man, little place of his own, breeds Pekingese, that sort of fellow. The rector's wife set him on to call. Mrs. Brase was very short with him too. Told him Julian had gone off for a holiday and left no address. The brother thought

it over for a day or two and then came to the county police and said it was queer. The rector's wife seems to have stirred him up. The chief constable didn't think much of it, but he put some men on and they found out that nobody had seen Julian go away. You know what a country station is. The local magnate gets noticed. Julian wasn't. And the Brase chauffeur swore he didn't go in one of his own cars. Then the chief constable began to sit up and take notice. He asked me what to do about it. I said, have the lady seen by an inspector and shaken up. So an inspector called and Mrs. Brase told him her husband had gone to the devil and turned him out. The inspector thought her peevish."

"Not one of our good liars," said Mr. Fortune sadly. "He was ill. He had gone to London. He had gone on a holiday. He had gone to the devil."

"Quite feminine," Lomas smiled. "Quite conjugal. They've had a row and the lady didn't want it known."

"Yes, yes. Does it seem to you that explains anything? When was the missing husband missed?"

"My dear fellow!" Lomas looked at him with sympathy. "I told you, you know. A week ago. When they were due to dine at the rectory and Mrs. Brase said he was ill."

"I know you told me," said Mr. Fortune, a

little petulant, a little shrill. "I mean when was he last seen? Who last saw him?"

"Oh, I haven't gone into it," Lomas waved it away. "It's no matter."

Mr. Fortune sat up. "He's reported missing when he has an outside engagement. He's said to be gone and no one saw him go. But it's no matter."

"My dear fellow! He had legs when last heard of. He could have walked to Kingford or Highbury—say four miles and both busy stations. He might have picked up a car on the road. We know nothing about it."

"That's what I'm pointing out, Lomas."

"Yes, I see. Quite. But, my dear Reginald, why so earnest? We're not taking it up, you know. I only told you to amuse you. You mustn't let it bother your head."

"Don't soothe me," Mr. Fortune cried. "I'm not an invalid."

"Of course not." Lomas smiled at him paternal affection. "In the pink. Extremely pink, to be frank. Well, when we have anything you shall hear all about it. I must really be going, you know." Of which he had no intention, but as he did intend he made Reggie Fortune's hospitable conscience smart and he was persuaded to dine and sleep and promised one of Elise's *suprêmes* and some Montrachet of nobility.

The dinner was all that Mr. Fortune's fancy painted, but afterwards as they sat on either side a fire of old apple wood Lomas was called to the telephone. He came back humming a love song of musical comedy. Mr. Fortune looked at him reproachfully. "You said I should hear when you had anything, Lomas," he complained.

"Confound you," Lomas frowned—and laughed. "Well, it is something. Mrs. Brase has bolted."

"Well, well," said Reggie Fortune.

"She went off by the London train to-day. When the police heard of it she was clear away. No trace the London end. They went up to Brase Hall. She had told the servants she was never coming back. That's all."

"And very interestin' too," Reggie murmured and reached for a cigar.

"No," said Lomas with decision. "You've had quite enough. Go to bed and sleep, Reginald. It isn't your case."

"Oh, I shall sleep all right," said Mr. Fortune. "You really are soothing, you know."

Though Lomas has a European fame for late rising Reggie Fortune was later next morning. He appeared dreamy and benign, as Lomas drew to the end of breakfast, praised the beauties of Nature and gave a lecture on sausages with an excursus on the right kind of marmalade to eat after them.

It was at this point that the telephone asked for Lomas again.

When he was done with it he found Reggie extended peaceful with a large cigar. "May I ring for my car?" he said and did so.

"Are you taking up the case, Lomas?" Reggie smiled.

An official solemnity rebuked him. "Julian Brase has been found," Lomas announced. "This morning his body was found in his own park. The county police have asked for our assistance. Of course this alters the whole case."

"Dear Lomas," Reggie chuckled. "Has he been moved?"

"I told them to touch nothing. I am going over at once. I've telephoned for Bell."

"Me too," said Reggie Fortune and rolled out of his chair.

The car bore them away by the road at the foot of the downs. "I feel rather criminal, Reginald," Lomas apologized. "I wish I hadn't mentioned the case to you."

"I wouldn't be out of it for the world."

"You're really not yourself, you know. It's not like you to be so keen."

"It's not like your usual cases, Lomas."

"Isn't it?" said Lomas gloomily.

"Well, look at it. He was missing a week ago. His wife bolted yesterday. He's found this morn-

ing. Not quite normal crime, Lomas, old thing. Very odd sequence."

"We don't know that it is a crime."

"No, no. Slight flavour of the late Dr. Crippen upside down. But nothing definite. No base imitation."

"What do you make of it?"

"I wonder," Reggie murmured. "I wonder."

"You thought there was something queer last night."

Reggie chuckled. "Aha! The mysterious, sinister figure of the rector's wife."

Lomas with some heat declined to know what he meant.

Where the downs break into a cluster of hills Brase Hall stands grey in a hollow and takes the valley and one sheltering hill for its park. The car turned in at a gate guarded by two stone bears of the Brase arms and one policeman. He stopped them, saluted Lomas's name, said the inspector was waiting for them and they must turn off the drive and take the track up the hill and they could not miss him. "Very efficient, Reginald," Lomas smiled. But Reggie only grunted.

The lower slopes of the park bore mighty trees of beech and ash, but when they turned and climbed the track led over bare turf. On the wind-swept breast of the hill nothing moved, the turf bore no marks but that of the old grey track by which

they climbed and another coming to meet it on a long slant from the blue smoke where a village nestled.

They came in sight of the circle of stunted beech that marked the summit. There stood two cars and some men.

One of them hurried forward. "Mr. Lomas, sir? I'm Inspector Warnham." He was bull-necked and brisk. "Only waiting for you to move him."

"Quite right. This is Mr. Fortune, inspector, our medical expert."

"I've got a doctor here, sir. He says it's quite a clear case. Man was shot in the head."

"Sounds conclusive," Reggie murmured.

The inspector nodded. "Yes, sir. Pretty clear. You'd like to speak to Dr. Harcourt? Here we are."

Dr. Harcourt, a voluble fellow, could tell Mr. Fortune all about it in a sentence and took twenty, but they reached the body at last.

Julian Brase lay on his face in the ring of beech trees, a slight body in brown tweed on the brown leaves. He might have been asleep but for his stiffness, but for the dark stain which came from his head down his face and neck. Reggie knelt beside him and looked long, moved his cap and the head and bent closer and above him Dr. Harcourt discoursed, telling him what he should see with growing impatience.

Reggie rose slowly and stood surveying the landscape. "Extensive view, what?" he murmured and wandered away.

"What about it, Fortune?" Lomas called.

Reggie turned and strolled towards him. "Well, the man was shot by a revolver fired close to the left temple and died some days ago." He looked curiously at Inspector Warnham. "Any questions?"

"Why did they bring him to the top of a hill to shoot him?" said Lomas.

The inspector nodded. "Ah that's got it, sir." He lowered his voice. "This place here was the favourite walk of Mrs. Brase. Kind of haunt of hers," he gave the aspirates a sinister emphasis.

"Who put you on to it?"

"Well, sir, when we heard Mrs. Brase had bolted we made arrangements to search the place. There was talk in the village as Mr. Brase might be somewhere in the park and some said as Mrs. Brase was often up here. I couldn't tell you who said it first."

Reggie smiled wearily. "The rector's wife, Lomas," he said and again wandered away.

"It might be or it mightn't." The inspector was offended. "Does the gentleman want to do any more, sir?" He stared angrily at Reggie's back.

"I'm afraid he wants to do a lot more," said Lomas and went after him while the inspector

and the doctor conferred and agreed that Mr. Fortune was too clever by half.

It is not the impression that he is wont to make. He has been heard to apologize for his work on the case, confessing he was not in his best form. Lomas, following him as he drifted hither and thither among the trees, thought that such aimless delay was sadly unlike him. He came to a stand on the edge of the hill where the tracks met and looked again at the extensive view. Lomas put a hand on his shoulder. "Always jolly where the chalk ends, isn't it?" Reggie murmured.

"My dear fellow! Do you feel up to this?" Lomas said anxiously.

"Yes, I think so," Reggie smiled.

Inspector Warnham arrived to ask if Mr. Fortune wished to be present at the post-mortem. Reggie contemplated him with dreamy eyes. "Oh, ah. Where does that track go to?" he pointed to the one by which they had not come.

"That one? Down to Brase. The village," the inspector snapped.

"Where the rector's wife is," Reggie murmured. "You didn't come up that way?"

"No, sir, we didn't. Would you come along, please? Dr. Harcourt's in a hurry."

Reggie stared at him in a mild surprise and strolled down the village track. He came back to find the body already in a car and the doctor fum-

ing, but he lingered about the place where it had lain. "Perhaps you'll join me at Horsbury, Mr. Fortune," the doctor cried and drove away.

Mr. Fortune rose from the ground. "And that's that," he murmured.

Inspector Warnham snorted. Inspector Warnham and his men climbed into their car and departed and still Reggie wandered among the trees.

"What is it? Reginald?"

"Hasty, don't you think, a little hasty?"

"Why, there's nothing more here."

Reggie stared at him with large, vague eyes. "No. Nothing here. Come on." They walked to their car and Reggie sank down in his seat with a sigh. "Let her out, Lomas, or they'll hang somebody before we get there."

"Who?"

"I don't know. I don't know. A horrid case, Lomas. Oh what a tangled web we weave when first we practise to deceive. Let her go. No paltry caution."

In his office at Horsbury the Chief Constable of Wessex presided over a conference. He was a colonel of the old school and he had a good deal to say which was not relevant and Inspector Warnham reported what they all knew and Lomas, who had been reinforced by his lieutenant, Superintendent Bell, smoked many cigarettes.

The afternoon was thus far spent when they

were interrupted by the appearance of Mr. Fortune. "I hope I don't intrude?" he murmured as Lomas introduced him.

"Come in, doctor, come in," said the chief constable. "We're waiting for the medical evidence."

"Well, the dead man had lived rather fast. Not a very nice man."

"We've got nothing against him, doctor," said the inspector.

"Lived a man's life, eh what?" the chief constable chuckled.

"Yes. He was feeling like that. He was shot in the left temple at close quarters by a service revolver. Death was immediate. And he died some days ago."

"Say a week?" the inspector asked sharply.

"Quite possible. Oh, is that a map of the place?" Reggie bent over the table. "Six-inch ordnance? Good!" Superintendent Bell made room for him and he sat down to it.

"Service revolver," the inspector repeated. "Sure of that, doctor?"

Bell snorted. Lomas laughed. Reggie looked up and gazed mildly at Inspector Warnham. "Oh, I think so, I think so," he said and produced a small box wherein on cotton-wool lay a revolver bullet. "Any objection?"

"That's all right." The inspector rubbed his

hands. "Service revolver. Mr. Brase went through the war, sir." He turned to the chief constable. "There'd be a service revolver of his handy."

"It wasn't suicide, you know," Reggie murmured.

"I bet it wasn't," the inspector grinned. "We'll have a hunt for that revolver, sir."

"Yes, yes. Might have a look for the cartridge case too," said Reggie. "Did you notice it wasn't there?"

"What do you mean?" the inspector cried.

"The blood wasn't there, either."

"Blood! He'd bled down all his face and neck."

"Yes, yes. And not a drop on the ground. Very tidy of him."

"I don't know what you're getting at, doctor."

"He wasn't killed where you found him dead."

Bell smiled benevolently. "Now you've got something, Warnham."

"God bless my soul!" said the chief constable. "You mean to say his body was carried up there?"

"I shall say at the inquest he wasn't killed where you found him."

"What's the sense of that?" The inspector frowned.

"My dear fellow! Oh my dear fellow! You supply the sense. I only produce the facts." Mr. Fortune bent again over the map.

"Shot him somewhere else, eh?" The inspector

thought it over. "I don't know but what you're right. She's deep, I take my oath. If it was somewhere near the house he was killed—wouldn't do to have him lying about there. I reckon he was shot that first day he was missed. She had a week to play about in. Some of the servants might be in it. They're most of 'em potty about her. Dashed fine figure of a woman she is. I'll put them through it, sir. But I reckon we've got to find Madame Brase, that's what it is."

"*Cherchez la femme*, what, what?" said the chief constable. "That's the thing, Warnham."

"Well, well," said Reggie and lay back in his chair and gazed at them as they began to devise the hunt for Mrs. Brase and sighed and left them to it.

Lomas and Bell put up at the "White Bull." They were at dinner in a corner of its sepulchral coffee-room—none dines at the "White Bull" but those who must—when Reggie joined them. "I thought you'd gone after the vanished wife, Reginald," Lomas smiled.

"Hush! I am empty. I am very empty. Talk of something comfortable," said Reggie and began to praise the flowers of the Wessex country-side. There was in particular a stream with forget-me-nots and marsh-marigolds.

Thus they arrived in the musty but seventeenth-century sitting-room reserved for them before the

case was spoken of again. Then Reggie, swaying before the fire with his cigar, said, "Well, what about Mrs. Brase?" Bell handed him a photograph.

"Oh my aunt," he murmured. It showed a woman tall and strongly built, a woman who might be handsome, but was given by photography a haggard and restless aspect.

"They say she don't take well, but this is like her. Striking face, sir."

"Striking!" Lomas chuckled. "That's the word, Bell."

"Yes. But you can't hang her for her face."

"It will rather prepare the public mind though," Lomas said.

"This isn't the photograph we're circulating, Mr. Fortune," Bell explained. "But they're all alike."

"Oh, photograph and description to all police stations. Warrant too?"

"No, sir. Not yet."

"You surprise me."

"Spoke very sarcastic," Lomas smiled. "Reginald, you're being superior. It hurts my trustful nature. What's the matter?"

"You're all so nasty."

Lomas shrugged. "The woman ran away. We've got to run after her."

"What's the case against Mrs. Brase?"

"That's what I want her to tell me."

"Charge her first, find the evidence afterwards."

Bell shook his head. "She shouldn't have run, Mr. Fortune."

"One murdered husband is a prima facie case," Lomas said mildly. "I want to hear her explanation. She's given four, you know. He was ill. He'd gone to London. He'd gone on a holiday. He'd gone to the devil. And all the while he was dead."

"The case against her is that the rector's wife don't like her, the county don't like her, the county police don't like her and the county inspector is God's own ass."

"My dear fellow, somebody killed the husband. We must ask her for her views about that. It's only decent. He was shot at her door."

"You think so?" said Reggie. "I'm going to swear he wasn't killed in the park."

Bell whistled. Lomas sat up. "This isn't quite nice of you, Reginald," he said. "Not even in the park? Evidence grown a little, hasn't it?"

"Yes. I had found sand in the blood clot. I didn't know the park was all chalk."

"A little subtle, a little thin, isn't it?" Lomas frowned. "Anything more up your sleeve?"

"No. That's the lot. But it don't fit Mrs. Brase."

"I don't know. It might do very well. I've got a sleeve too, Reginald. There was a man

down in the village a month ago, painting or pretending to paint. Mrs. Brase said he was an old friend. She played at art in Paris before she was married. They were together a good deal. It was talked about. Warnham says it made bad blood between her and her husband."

"The rector's wife again," said Reggie.

"I dare say. Brase has a brother too, you know."

"Yes, yes. Lots of nice friends for Mrs. Brase. Was the artist down here when Brase was missed?"

"No evidence."

"Rector's wife draws the line somewhere. Who is the mysterious artist?"

"Used the name of Alford. Big fellow. Spoke with some sort of a twang. Foreign in his ways, they say."

"Big fellow. And she's big too," Reggie murmured. His round face was lined with melancholy. "I wonder."

"You mean they could have carried him up there between them, sir?" said Bell eagerly.

Reggie gazed at him. "It could be. Sorry, Lomas. My error. You'll have to find them. Nasty case." He rose like a very tired man and lounged out.

"Not himself, Mr. Lomas." Bell shook his head. "Not up to it yet, he isn't."

But the morning brought Reggie down in his

usual amiable placidity, only a little silent and dreamy. He woke up when Lomas spoke of going back to town. "Yes. You go and find them. "Leave me Bell."

"My dear fellow! Are you staying? There is nothing more for you, is there?"

"I don't know. I don't know the place. I don't know anything. Leave me Bell. I want him to protect me. I'm afraid of this fierce inspector."

Lomas went off with a shrug and a laugh. "All right. Don't let him hang the rector's wife, Bell."

The methods of Mr. Fortune seemed to Superintendent Bell uncommonly frivolous. They took a car, they put it up at an inn two miles from Brase Hall, they walked out not to the place where the body was found but by a rambling route to the village of Brase. On the way, they talked with every human creature they met, in the village they had to wander about like trippers, admiring a cottage here and there, going over the church with the sexton, drinking beer with the landlord of the inn. Superintendent Bell admired, not for the first time, Mr. Fortune's ability to make anybody talk to him, but found the innumerable conversations remote from the crime.

When they came out of the inn Mr. Fortune smiled. "Well, what do you make of it all, Bell?"

"Sir?" Bell stared.

"They all like Mrs. Brase. And nobody cares a damn about him."

"Now you put it like that," Bell said slowly.

But Reggie slid back from his wondering eyes into the porch of the inn. "Look at that. Go and talk to him. Don't say I'm here." Bell was left staring at the police car which stood by the rectory gate. He obeyed orders.

When the inspector and his car were out of sight, Reggie joined him again. "Warnham's been up searching the Hall with Brase's brother," Bell reported. "Found nothing much. No pistol. Some old letters to her, signed Tim. He says that's this artist chap. But he can't get any proof the man was here last week. That's what he went to the rectory about. He's made up his mind Mrs. Brase hasn't gone abroad. He's found her passport."

"Passport!" said Reggie with contempt. "Well, well. There's some brains somewhere. But not in Warnham. One of the bulldog breed. Muddled case, isn't it?"

"He's not what I'd call bright, sir. But he's working the only clues he's got."

Reggie stopped. "Oh, Bell! Oh, my Bell!" he said sadly. "He hasn't even begun."

"No, sir? Where would you begin?"

"When was the dead man last seen alive? Who saw him? Where was he?"

"I reckon Mrs. Brase is the one to tell us that."

"Oh my aunt'! Of course the murderer saw him last. But there must be somebody here who saw him last but one. Who was it and where was he?"

"Well, sir, Warnham's got it pretty close. Brase was alive at the Hall at lunch-time on that day of the rector's dinner. He didn't sleep at the Hall that night. He must have been killed between lunch and dinner time. That's near enough."

"My only aunt!" Reggie gasped. "Nothing strike you about that, Bell? No? But it's all sand down here and it's all chalk in the park. He was killed on sand, you know."

Bell thought it out. "That's neat, sir," he said with respect. "You mean I ought to look about in the village for some one who saw him that afternoon?"

"Not you. No. You're too conspicuous. But I think we'll have one of your bright boys down."

"Harland, sir. He can sketch. Like this artist chap. I'll phone for him when we get back to Horsbury."

They had indented for Sergeant Harland, they were sitting over tea when Inspector Warnham's car drew up at the inn. He entered with a grin. "Hallo, doctor. Taking it easy? I've got something for you. I've got the pistol. Would that do the trick?"

Reggie looked at it curiously. "It's a service revolver."

"I know that, thank you," the inspector laughed.

"Where did you find it?"

"Up there where we found the body."

Reggie looked curiously at him. "Splendid," said Reggie. "Did you find the cartridge case too?"

"Nothing else about. But there's been one shot fired."

"Yes. I noticed that."

"When I couldn't find Mr. Brase's revolver in the house I thought I'd go and have another look on the hill. There it was, lying among the leaves, you know. I don't wonder I didn't notice it before. We were in the devil of a hurry."

"Yes. You were in a hurry. Is this Brase's revolver?"

"Got his initials on it anyway," the inspector laughed. "J. B., see?"

"Yes. Better get his brother to identify it."

"He has," said the inspector triumphantly. "I took it straight down to him at his place. He knew it at once. He saw Mr. Brase put those marks on it himself. That's good enough, eh?" He laughed. "There we are, superintendent. You find Mrs. Brase for us and we'll do the rest." He bustled out.

Mr. Fortune lit a cigar and sank deep into his chair.

"Looks as if he was really killed up there, sir," said Bell sadly.

Mr. Fortune turned on him a slow benign smile. "Some error," he murmured gently. "Some error."

Bell had trouble with his pipe. He had met that smile before. It was wont to lead to action. But it did not. Mr. Fortune seemed to have lost his grip.

The telephone called. Lomas was speaking. Lomas wanted to know what was doing about the inquest. "Don't mind me," Mr. Fortune said. Bell conferred with Warnham and suggested to Mr. Fortune that they should begin to-morrow, give evidence of identification and adjourn. "Yes," Mr. Fortune murmured. "Make Warnham happy. Make 'em all happy."

In the morning he declined, amiable but quite firm, to attend that inquest. But while it was being held in the parish room at Brase, he appeared in the silent village, he spent some time there and chatted with the young artist who was sketching that picturesque bit by the rectory.

Superintendent Bell came back to the "White Bull" to find him at tea and politely ready to hear all about everything. Bell had many grievances. He hated all inquests and all coroners and these two he pronounced conspicuously evil in their evil kind. "This old fellow, sir, he as good as told

his jury at the start Mrs. Brase did the murder. Nice sort of justice. Nice for the police too. Telling her we've got a case when we haven't got her!"

"Very fair all round," said Reggie. "Who identified the body? The rector's wife?"

"She was there all right. Telling everybody how Mr. and Mrs. Brase were always quarrelling. The brother, Roger Brase, was called to identify. Just swore to the body. The old coroner was going to ask him something but I made Warnham get up and stop that."

"Well, well. What's Roger Brase like?"

"Smallish chap, dark, looks sporting. Gone the pace in his time, I should say."

"As like his brother as no matter."

"Yes, sir, so they say."

Again the telephone interrupted them. "Mr. Lomas, sir," Bell reported. "You'd better hear yourself."

And Reggie heard this. "Is that you, Reginald? Congratulate me. I've found her. She's at St. Ives. My idea entirely. I thought she might be in some artist colony, so I tried them all. She's at St. Ives."

"Splendid," said Reggie. "In her own name? Fancy that. Found the man too?"

"He's been there all the winter. Left a week ago, Reginald. We're after him. But we'll make

sure of her. Warnham's sending down a man with a warrant to-night. What did you say ? "

" I said God save the King." said Mr. Fortune and rang off. But when he came back to Bell the superintendent saw again that slow benign smile forming. What he said was of startling irrelevance. " Any views about Warnham, Bell ? I mean to say, is he playing the game ? "

" Sir ? I've got nothing against him. He's got twenty years' service. Absolutely straight, I should say."

" Well, well. There's no hurry," Mr. Fortune murmured.

The next morning he went up to town, declaring that he was in need of edible food. When he came back, Bell found that they had been reinforced by his car and his chauffeur and factotum, Sam. Late in the evening Mrs. Brase was brought to Horsbury and charged with the murder. Bell, who attended that ceremony, reported that she didn't turn a hair and didn't say a word.

She was brought before the magistrates in the morning. Reggie went to see that and found Lomas going into the court. " Come down to see your triumph, Lomas ? How nice and human of you."

" So glad to find you here, Reginald," Lomas smiled. " I was afraid you were losing interest in the case."

"Oh, we're all here. Look, there's the rector's wife."

What Lomas was going to answer was hushed by the coming of the magistrates. Mrs. Brase was put into the dock, a large stately woman who stared straight before her. Her face had the pallor of ivory, but she showed no fear nor any other emotion. "More chin than brow," Lomas whispered.

"Yes. She married Brase," said Reggie.

She was charged with murder. She said she was not guilty. The clerk asked her if she had counsel. "You have not given me time," she said quietly. There were murmurs of consultation. The counsel for the public prosecutor arose—they would not take it far that day—every facility would be given—and Inspector Warnham went into the box. It had been reported to the police that Julian Brase was missing. He had called on Mrs. Brase who told him that her husband had gone to the devil. He called the next day and she had left home. He searched the house and park and found Julian Brase shot. He later found on the spot a revolver marked J. B.

The prosecution proposed to adjourn.

"I wish to say——" Mrs. Brase began.

"Better not, better not," said the old chairman.

"I wish to say that my husband was alive when

I saw him last. It was in my room at the Hall. He asked me for money. There was nothing new about that. I refused him. He went out of the room and I never saw him again. I don't know what became of him."

With that, with another admonition to consult a solicitor, the Bench adjourned and she was led away.

"Striking woman," said Lomas and let his eyeglass fall. "She won't perish without a cry." He turned to Reggie, who was not there.

Reggie was outside the court, watching the spectators depart. There were many cars. It was difficult to attract his attention. Lomas came up with him as he was chatting with his own chauffeur. "Don't shun me, Reginald."

"Dear Lomas! Did I ever?" Reggie drew him away. "But I want you. I want you to get that pistol for me."

"Good gad!" said Lomas. "You never mentioned the pistol before."

"No," said Reggie. "Not before. Come on. Talk pretty to Warnham."

"What do you want to do?"

"Fire it," said Mr. Fortune.

They turned into the police head-quarters. The chief constable and Inspector Warnham were, in a decent official way, very pleased with themselves and had to say so and let Lomas know that they

thought he had done quite well. It was not good for a ruffled temper. Lomas was curt. "I don't see the end of the case yet. Where's the revolver? Mr. Fortune wants to make some experiments."

"The revolver? Mr. Roger Brase will swear to that," said Warnham sulkily.

"Did he see it fired?" said Reggie.

"Of course he didn't see it fired. What do you mean, doctor?"

"Well, I mean several things. I mean it wasn't there when we found the body."

"You couldn't see it, so it wasn't there."

"Yes. I couldn't see it, so it wasn't there," said Reggie mildly.

"But it was there and I found it."

"That's what so interesting," said Reggie. "Isn't it, Lomas?"

"It's going to be damned awkward for somebody." Lomas frowned.

"I don't know what you mean, sir?" the inspector cried.

"Well, how did it get there, for instance?" said Reggie, watching him. He was very red. "Are there any other service revolvers about in Brase? And who—well, never mind. The revolver, please."

Warnham stared at him angry defiance. "Come, come, come," said the chief constable. "Let the doctor have it, inspector."

They went off with it, hearing the inspector lift up his voice as the door closed. Reggie loitered. Reggie had to go into a tobacconist. While he was being critical of the local cigars, the inspector's car drove past furiously. "God bless him," Reggie smiled. "He has his uses. Come on, Lomas."

"Why the devil didn't you raise this before?"

"Oh, I have my uses too," said Reggie.

In the yard of the "White Bull"—it is the only comfortable part of that inn—stand several lock-up garages. Reggie led the way into one and fastened the doors. "We have here,"—he pointed to a corner,—"a bundle of cotton wool with a sandbag behind it. If the gentleman will satisfy himself there is no deception——"

"Get on," said Lomas.

"The revolver is that handed us by Inspector Warnham, certified to belong to the dead man, still containing five cartridges. Are you ready?" The garage reverberated as he fired five shots into the bundle. "We now collect the cartridge cases—and the bullets." It took some time. "Five in all. Come on." He marched Lomas up to their room.

Bell stood there poring over some small sheets of paper. "I say, Mr. Fortune——" he began.

"One moment. One moment. We now examine our bullets under a magnifying glass of low power and we find that—in between the regular grooves—they exhibit each two scratches——"

"You don't want a glass to see 'em," Lomas grumbled.

"Caused by some small faults in the barrel of the J. B. revolver. We now compare the bullet which killed J. B. And find—only one scratch—quite different."

"Good gad!" said Lomas.

"The provisional conclusion is that Julian Brase was not shot with the revolver placed where his body was found."

"Provisional!" Lomas cried.

"God bless my soul," said Bell. "Here, Mr. Fortune—you ought to hear this."

"What's your trouble, Bell?"

"It's a report from Harland, sir. He's found a chap who goes round the villages with a cart selling china—always calls at Brase on Mondays—he says that on the Monday Julian Brase was first missed he saw him go into his brother's house in the afternoon. Quite definite. Harland says he makes a good witness."

"Yes. I thought Mrs. Brase was telling the truth," said Reggie. "That fits. Julian asked her for money after lunch. He went down to tell brother Roger she wouldn't give it him and—and brother Roger identifies a pistol that was found where he was found dead."

"But it was brother Roger reported him dead, sir."

"Well, brother Roger and the rector's wife. Strong determined woman. Brother Roger's been a little coy all through, don't you think? He hasn't exactly thrust himself on us. He only talks to Warnham. Stay-at-home fellow. Yet he has a car—though he didn't come in it this morning."

"What do you mean?" said Lomas quickly.

But Reggie held up his hand. Some one was coming heavily upstairs. The door opened to reveal a policeman. "Mr. Lomas, sir? The chief constable says would you step round immediate."

Lomas beckoned to Reggie. In the outer office they passed a large man fidgeting impatiently under the gaze of curious policemen. The chief constable, purple of face, was conferring with a uniformed inspector. "Ha, Lomas! Good. Here's a new development. That artist fellow, Mrs. Brase's flame, has turned up. We've got him sitting out there now. He came in as bold as brass and asked if it was true Mrs. Brase was charged with her husband's murder. Seen all this stuff in the papers, he said. The inspector here asked him what business it was of his. He says he has a statement to make that will clear her."

"Well, he'll have to make it, Colonel," said Lomas.

"Quite so. Just my view. Bring him in. You'll take down what he says, Jordan." The large man was brought. "Now sir, who are you and where do you come from?"

"Timothy Arnold. Paris last. I live at St. Ives. Who are you?"

"The chief constable of Wessex, sir."

"You've put Mrs. Brase in the dock for murder?"

"Ha. Has Mrs. Brase been communicating with you, sir?"

"Mrs. Brase didn't know where I was."

"I dare say." The chief constable laughed and turned to Lomas. "I dare say, eh?"

Lomas shrugged. "Mrs. Brase was charged with murder this morning," he said. "Do you want to say anything about it?"

"I'm here to say she didn't kill the man."

"You want to give evidence for the defence?"

"No, sir. I've come to give myself up. I shot her husband."

The chief constable breathed hard. Lomas put up his eyeglass. "Be careful," he said. "That is a confession of murder. What you say can be used against you."

"That's what I'm here for. I'm an old friend of Mrs. Brase. I hadn't seen her since she was married till this spring. I was down here sketching. I found her husband was a drunken, gambling brute, giving her a hell of a life. I couldn't stand for it. I came back and found him alone up there in the park and shot him and cleared out to Paris. I never thought any man would be fool enough to

put it on Mrs. Brase. She—why, she never hurt anything. She couldn't. Then I saw in the papers what you were up to and here I am."

"Did you bring your pistol with you?" said Reggie.

"No, sir. That's in the Channel. You can go and dive for it."

"What sort of pistol was it?"

"My army pistol," Arnold laughed. "What do you think?"

Reggie lay back in his chair.

A silence was broken by the inspector laboriously reading out the record of the confession. "Will you sign that, Arnold?" Lomas asked.

"Sure."

"Very well. You'll be detained while we make inquiries." They watched him march out. "That's a sportsman," Lomas said.

"Damme, sir," cried the chief constable, "I always thought Mrs. Brase had a man with her in the business."

"She hadn't, according to Arnold," Reggie objected. "She wasn't in it at all. He clears her."

The chief constable laughed. "Don't you believe it, doctor. They're both in it. The eternal triangle, eh what? They wanted the husband out of the way."

"Oh my head!" Reggie murmured. "Either you believe him or you don't. Better make up

your mind which. A jury won't do both. Even juries have their limits." He turned, Inspector Warnham had come in. "Hallo, Warnham. Roger Brase still swearing to the pistol?"

Warnham glared at him. "Yes, doctor, I have been to see Mr. Roger Brase," he said sulkily, "and he says that was Mr. Julian's pistol and there never was any other at the Hall."

"Wash out, Warnham, wash out," the chief constable waved his hand. "Never mind that pistol. We've got a confession," and he told of it with glee.

Inspector Warnham struggled to reorganize his ideas. "Yes, sir, there was a lot of talk about Mrs. Brase and this artist fellow. I did always have a notion he was in it. But what about the pistol I found?"

"Yes. You'll want some new evidence," Reggie smiled.

Lomas stood up as one having authority. "Arnold's story must be tested," he announced. "I'll arrange for inquiries about his movements at St. Ives and in Paris. You must see if you can find any trace of his being here. Let's have a scheme ready for the morning."

They went back to the inn and Reggie stretched himself upon two chairs. "Well-meaning man," he murmured. "Did it all for the best."

"Who do you mean?" said Lomas testily.

"Oh, all of them. The old colonel—the hasty Warnham—T. Arnold, artist. All meaning so well."

"You're helpful, aren't you?" said Lomas. "It's a cursed mess of a case. Here, Bell, let's get to business." Superintendent Bell, listening in sad surprise to this bad temper, was told of the confession and required to concert measures for the discovery of Arnold's movements. And Mr. Fortune watched and listened. But he seemed to be listening for something else.

It did not come till after dinner, it came with the purr of a car and the quick step of Sam the chauffeur. Reggie sprang up to meet him. "Well? Anything happened?"

"Quite a lot, sir. Harland and me been watching Roger Brase's place like you said. Warnham came over there this afternoon and was inside for a while and went away. Roger Brase saw him off and walked about in the grounds a bit. After dark he came out again. Walked down to that bit of rough ground behind. Knelt down and stuffed something into a rabbit hole. Kicked the earth out of it and went back to the house. Then we got on to it and this is what he was burying." He held out another service revolver.

Reggie took it. "Sand, Lomas, old thing," he smiled. "Lots of sand." He shook the revolver over a sheet of Bell's official paper

"Of course there's sand," said Lomas. "The thing's been in a rabbit hole."

"Yes. But this is the right sort of sand. The sand that was in Julian Brase's blood. Service revolver. Marked R. B. Empty. Barrel not foul. But a trifle of sand about. Just clean it, Sam. Another little experiment is indicated."

"There's no cartridges," Lomas objected.

"Oh, I have some. I thought we might get a little more shooting."

Again they went to the garage, switched on the light and shut themselves in. "Ordinary service ammunition, Lomas. No deception. We now load and fire. Six bullets, Sam."

In the upper room he laid them on the table and sat down and bent over one with the magnifying glass. But Lomas was quicker. "Good gad!" he said softly. "The single scratch."

Reggie examined them one by one, slowly, minutely. "Yes. One scratch," he said at last and compared them with the bullet that killed Julian Brase. "Which is the same scratch. And that's that." He lay back in his chair and smiled. "There's your case, Lomas."

And again Lomas said, "Good gad!"

"Yes. I always told you Warnham had his uses."

"What the devil has Warnham got to do with it?"

"He went out and told Roger there was some catch about the revolver. So Roger thought he'd better put his out of the way. And here we are."

"Yes, sir," said Bell. "But what about this fellow Arnold?"

"Oh Arnold! He's irrelevant. He's picturesque. He only wanted to hang himself to save Flora Brase. He believes she did it, of course. I dare say she'll forgive him."

Lomas said something about Mr. Arnold. Lomas went out to wrestle with a chief constable who was incredulous, bewildered and at last anxious to oblige. For the rest of that night Sergeant Harland kept watch on the house of Roger Brase. Early in the morning Inspector Warnham called there once again and arrested Roger Brase as the murderer of his brother. It was reported by the accompanying constable that their drive back to Horsbury was like hell, so wild were the reproaches of Roger Brase at Warnham's false friendship, so fiercely morose Inspector Warnham.

Taking the morning air at the door of the "White Bull" Mr. Fortune and Superintendent Bell watched that car pass. "Not a nice man, Bell," said Mr. Fortune and went in to breakfast.

"I've been wondering what set him on to do murder, sir."

"Well, go back to the beginning. The two of them, Julian the heir to an estate that was loaded

with debt, Roger the younger brother. Both of 'em went the pace. Julian catches an heiress. His marrying clears the estate, but if he had a child that would cut Roger out. He didn't and there was plenty of money going. Roger came in for his share. Then the wife found out her husband was a wrong 'un and money got scarce. You heard her say, Julian wanted money and she turned him down. Julian went off to tell brother Roger. No more money out of Julian's wife. But if Julian was to die, the estate, the cleared estate, would come to Roger. Julian and Mrs. Julian were known to be quarrelling. There was Arnold in the offing. If Julian was murdered, lots of the best people, like the rector's wife, would suspect Mrs. Brase. It ought to be pretty easy to put it on her. That's how it looked to Roger. So he shot. A clever fellow. Quite clever fellow. But a little timid."

"Timid, sir?" Bell gasped.

"Well, it was all going nicely, but he wasn't comfortable. He had to get Julian's revolver and put it up on the hill. His error. His gross error."

"He'd have got away with it if these Wessex police had handled the case."

"Yes. I wonder how many clever fellows do get away with it?"

At this point, Lomas, who loves not breakfast, arrived to contemplate in horror the relics on the table.

"Just reconstructin' the crime, Lomas," Reggie smiled.

"My God!" said Lomas reverently and drank a cup of coffee with visible effort.

"Fresh air and gentle exercise," Reggie advised him, "and you won't know yourself at lunch. Come on. I'm going to Brase."

Some village folk gaped from the road at the shut windows and drawn blinds of Roger Brase's house. "Want to go in, sir?" Bell said as Reggie stopped the car.

"I want to go into the garage."

Superintendent Bell, introducing himself to the frightened housekeeper, asked for the key. Mr. Brase had the key. The garage stood in a shrubbery away from the house. A little experiment on the lock by Bell persuaded it to open. Reggie pulled the dust sheet off the little car within. "Sturton Mandeville, two seater, Gorham tyres. You'll find marks to fit that on the track from the village through the park. Open the doors wide, will you. Yes. There are blood-stains on the seat and the floor. I thought he was very coy with his car."

"Do you think the man was killed in here, sir?"

"Oh, no, no. Remember the sand. No. On that afternoon Julian came to the house and our china merchant saw him go in. Nobody saw him go out. Where did he go? To see the grounds? Let us see brother Roger's grounds. They walked

across a tennis lawn through the garden and beyond the garden into rough ground where heather and furze grew amid broken patches of sand.

Here Sam joined them. "Want to see where he hid the pistol, sir. This way." He led them on, explaining volubly.

But Reggie wandered off by himself. They found him in a little hollow, contemplating a clump of gorse. "Look. Something has lain in there." The bushes were twisted and broken. "Something that left thread on the gorse." He collected them carefully. "Brown woollen threads. And Julian was in brown tweed." He moved to and fro and stirred the loose sand, peered here and there, stooped and picked up a cartridge case. "Service ammunition. Marked by the ejector with a deep nick similar to that in the cartridges fired from brother Roger's revolver. Well, well." He smiled serene. But suddenly his smile faded. "Oh my aunt! Look!" A woman was coming, a plump, important woman in black at full speed. "The rector's wife! Mr. Lomas will now explain himself to the rector's wife." He fled.

THE CAT BURGLAR

"THE decisive factor," said Mr. Fortune sleepily, "the decisive factor was that Doris Bromsgrove married Bill Davis. That tore it." He smiled at the bewildered face of the Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department. "Seems irrelevant, what? Who knows the inscrutable design? Doris falls in love with Bill Davis, most ordinary, most correct. And Satan's invisible world's displayed."

"The nastiest case of my time," said Lomas. "I suppose you know you're merely babbling, Reginald."

"No, no. The web of life. Doris Bromsgrove —as clean and simple as milk—she gets bound up with Mr. Maple Vansittart. It's like finding a link between music and a rat's diseases. Well, there is, of course. Queer, interestin' world, Lomas, old thing."

So afterwards he philosophized. But he saw nothing queer in the beginning. Doris Bromsgrove, the daughter of that eminent throat specialist, Sir Alcester Bromsgrove, met Bill Davis when he was her father's house physician and as

soon as he was established in a thriving way fell in love with him. She always found it comfortably natural to do the right thing. They married with universal approval and Reggie Fortune, who had known her since she could talk, and taught Bill Davis the little he will ever know of claret, sent them a parcel of Venetian glass for a wedding present and became a friend of the house. For Doris he respects as one of the few women who understand that tea is a meal.

One afternoon he called a little early. She was not in her drawing-room. When she appeared she had perhaps three hairs on her nice head out of their appointed places. She was almost excited. "Oh, how do you do? Is this professional?" she said.

"What have I done?" Mr. Fortune gazed at her with alarm. "Don't you love me any more?"

"You haven't heard? I very nearly sent for you this morning. We've had a burglary, Mr. Fortune."

"I'm so sorry. Anything serious?"

"Well, it's rather horrid in a way. The creatures have taken my moonstones."

"Moonstones," Mr. Fortune repeated.

"You know. The set that mother gave me. Dear things. We are insured, of course. But I did rather love them."

"Yes. Charming. Yes. Too bad. Anything else taken?"

"Nothing at all. We were really awfully lucky, as Bill says. Of course I haven't got so very much. But I was wearing my pearls and my diamond star."

"Oh. You were out?"

"We had gone to Lady Shovel's dance. We didn't get home till three and then my moonstones were gone. There were some other little things, but the poor burglar didn't get them. The police say that perhaps something frightened him."

"Yes. Do the police say anything else?"

"They say it was a cat burglar, Mr. Fortune. It's rather thrilling, isn't it? He must have been awfully clever to get up to my bedroom. The inspector said he was a high-class expert."

"Who is the inspector?"

"Inspector Pargo. Do you know him? He said the local police thought it was a case for Scotland Yard. He was very solemn and so quick and keen. I was quite frightened. But he is rather a lamb really."

"Pargo. Yes. He's a burglary specialist, much esteemed. And he says it was an expert's job. Well, well."

"What do you think of it, Mr. Fortune?"

"I don't think. They wouldn't like me to think about burglars."

"Oh, you believe there's something Inspector Pargo didn't see! How frightfully thrilling. Do come and look."

"It's not in my line, you know," Mr. Fortune murmured, but he let himself be taken up to her room, a pleasant airy place as neat as became her.

"There"—she demonstrated—"the moonstones were in this drawer. The inspector took the case away to look for finger-prints. But he said there wouldn't be any. He couldn't find any on the window or anywhere."

Mr. Fortune put his head out of the window. The room was on the second floor at the back, more than twenty feet above a small paved yard, behind which was a narrow street with houses only on the further side.

"The inspector said the burglar must have come down the mews there, got over the wall into the yard and climbed up by the drain pipe. Look! What a distance to stretch to my window-sill!" She shuddered. "Fancy! In the dark too! He must be an awfully good climber. I shouldn't like to be a burglar, Mr. Fortune."

Mr. Fortune brought his head in again and turned from the window to her dressing-table. Besides its silver apparatus, there was some jewellery, a gold bangle, a brooch of opals and diamonds. "These were lying about?" he said.

"No, not last night. They were in the drawer here with these other little things."

"But he might have had them if he'd looked."

"Isn't it lucky! He must have been frightened by some noise, the inspector said, and off he went. Fancy getting across to that pipe in the dark when he was frightened! How dreadful if he'd fallen!"

"Yes. Yes. That would have made a bad night of it," Mr. Fortune murmured.

"Oh!" she shuddered. "You're rather horrid, aren't you? Sort of cold. As if you didn't believe in it."

"My dear child, I believe everything. It happened. It all happened just as Pargo said. Some fellow came up the pipe last night and took your moonstones and went off with them, quite hasty."

Her brown eyes were still troubled. "You make it sound shivery. I hope he won't come again."

"Don't worry. He won't come again. Not twice."

He comforted her further at tea, he left her restored to her wonted simple gaiety, but he walked home by way of the mews and in the morning he called at Scotland Yard.

The Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department was on holiday. "Salmon-fishing, sir," Superintendent Bell explained, searching Mr. Fortune's round and placid face. "Didn't you happen to know?"

"I know. The ruling passion. He must play at catching creatures. How is life, Bell? Busy?"

"About the usual. Nothing big, you know."

"You have an anxious eye."

Bell laughed uneasily. "That's your fault, Mr. Fortune. You know, you see too much. I hope I'll never be up against you. But I wasn't worrying till you came in. You have a way of bringing us a bit of trouble."

"Oh, my Bell! How can you? I'm always smoothin' things out for you. And this is just a friendly call. Some friends of mine have been and had a burglar." Here Bell sighed. "I only wanted to say what about it?" said Mr. Fortune plaintively.

"Which case is that, sir?"

"Had a lot lately?"

"Oh no—not big stuff. There's always plenty of little jobs. We haven't had much high-class work since that crop of West End cases in the spring. The cracks have been lying low for a bit."

"This is a West End case. Holland Street. Dr. Davis's house, night before last."

Bell nodded. "I remember. Cat burglary. Rather fine work."

"Yes, yes. I thought that. Does anything else strike the expert mind?"

"What have you got, sir?" Bell grinned.

"Oh, me! I don't know any burglars. I'm a

child in these things. Please, sir, I want you to tell me all about it."

"Well, I don't know what there is to tell. Pargo's got the case. We'll have him up if he's here."

Inspector Pargo came, a slim, light moving man in clothes of commercial elegance. He was presented to Mr. Fortune and showed a proper sense of the honour. Mr. Fortune wanted to hear all about the Holland Street case. Inspector Pargo was still more impressed. "They're friends of mine, you see," said Mr. Fortune.

"I'm sorry, sir." Inspector Pargo shook his head. "I'm afraid it's a chance if the lady ever sees her jewellery again. The local police were quite right. It was a high-class professional job. We don't often recover the stuff when a crack gets away with it."

"No, no. A crack burglar don't often go after moonstones, does he?"

Inspector Pargo chuckled. "I should say not, sir. He made a poor bag that time. Moonstones!" His quick eyes twinkled at Superintendent Bell. "Not much market for that sort of stuff." He became serious again. "But I'm afraid the lady thought a lot of them, Mr. Fortune. We'll do what we can. As I was saying, it was a first-class crack and he had pretty good information."

"What about the servants?" said Bell.

"I've looked into them, sir. They seem all

right. No, I think it was worked from outside. He found out the lady had some good stuff, he got to know about her engagements and managed to pick a night when she and her husband were out. He had to take a chance what she was wearing and it didn't pan out. She hadn't left much behind her but the moonstones. I bet he was sick."

"Yes. Very clear. Yes. Would you bet you'll get him?"

Inspector Pargo looked knowing. "Oh, come, sir. Touch wood. It's not a thing to bet on."

"I suppose you know all the first-class men?" said Reggie meekly.

"I wish I did, Mr. Fortune. I know men who could have done it." He looked at Bell. "Not so many either, eh? First-class cat burglars—they're pretty rare. And they lie very low, the cracks. We've never got the man that brought off those jobs in the spring."

"Oh. One man did the lot, did he?"

Inspector Pargo looked at his superintendent again. "Not much doubt," Bell grunted.

"And one man here? Same man?"

"Ah, that's as may be." Inspector Pargo winked. "I couldn't say, sir. Spotting the man, you see, for a job of this kind, it's working over the cracks who could have done it and finding what they're up to. Then if you can get a line on one of them you may pick up some evidence."

"Any hopes?"

"I'm always hoping, sir. Is there anything you'd suggest, Mr. Fortune?"

"Me?" Mr. Fortune opened round eyes. "Oh no, not me. It's not in my way. I'm a child in these things. I only come in when you've got a corpse or so."

"I hope it won't come to that, sir," Inspector Pargo laughed. He conferred a moment with Bell, he promised to do his best for the lady, he was gone.

Mr. Fortune sat still. Mr. Fortune lit a cigar and gazed solemnly through the smoke at Bell. "Zeal, lots of zeal," he murmured.

"He knows his job, sir."

"But only one idea." Mr. Fortune sighed.

"Well, it's a pretty plain case."

"My dear fellow! Oh, my dear fellow! The hypothetical expert, he marks down Mrs. Davis as a lady worth burgling: which she isn't. He takes pains to find out all about her nice house: which hasn't anything in it. He chooses a night when she's out at a ball: when she'd be wearing any jewels she's got. With highly skilled agility he gets in, leaves a lot of gold trinkets alone and pinches a set of moonstones. That's a very remarkable expert."

Bell moved in his chair. "If you put it like that," he said slowly. "But you know you can

always put a case so it sounds silly. All crimes are silly in a way."

"Oh, my Bell! Oh, no. It's silly to be a criminal at all. But the clever fellows don't play the fool in their crimes."

"I've known a lot of 'em fall down over a silly blunder in a clever plan—just like this chap."

"Yes, yes. Only he hasn't fallen."

"Why, he only got the moonstones for all his trouble. That's what you're saying, sir."

"I wonder."

"Is there some catch about these moonstones?" Bell cried.

"No, no. They're just moonstones in a little white gold."

"I don't know what you're getting to, sir."

"Nor do I, Bell." Mr. Fortune rose and wandered to the door. "Quite dark, isn't it, quite dark." With the door open he paused and looked back. His round face was like a troubled child's. "I wonder what's next," he said.

Superintendent Bell breathed hard and when the door was shut allowed himself to remark that he wished Mr. Fortune wouldn't try to see what wasn't there.

On the next day, reading the evening paper in his bath before dinner, according to his habit, Mr. Fortune came upon the headline "Millionaire Cat Burglary." A brief bald narrative informed

him that the night before while Lord Silvertown, the soap king, and his wife were out at dinner her dressing-room had been entered by a cat-burglar who had gone off with most of her diamonds. Mr. Fortune came down in his dressing-gown and sought the telephone and called up Superintendent Bell. "That you, Bell? Fortune speaking. Which I wish to remark—now we do know what's next." The telephone reported an inarticulate noise. "Tut, tut," said Mr. Fortune.

"Is that all you wanted to say, sir?" said the telephone.

"And the next thing, please?" Mr. Fortune inquired. The telephone buzzed and cracked.

The morning papers told the same story with more flowers: reported on the day after that the police had important clues: wrote a history of famous cat burglaries: and forgot all about it. And in a week there was another. The heiress of a gentleman in the frozen meat trade found that her tiara and dog collar had gone from her bedroom while she was at the fancy dress ball of the season—the only night for weeks, she told reporters with emotion, when she had not worn them. The thought of a girl who never dined without a diamond tiara stirred the great heart of the people and newspapers were bitter about the police force and Mr. Fortune walked across the park to Scotland Yard.

Superintendent Bell lay back and looked at him heavily.

"Hallo, Bell. Seen the papers?" Mr. Fortune smiled.

"I don't worry about what the papers say," said Bell with slow reproachful emphasis.

"Yes. That's very noble. I'm not sure you're right."

"But I wish you didn't want to be funny, sir."

"Oh, Bell!" Mr. Fortune was affected. "Oh, my dear man. I don't. I wouldn't. I've been and walked all the way across the park to see you about it. Extraordinary energy. And very painful too. I don't ever walk. That shows how serious I'm taking it."

"That's what bothers me, sir. I know you're thinking something. But you will go on pulling my leg. Ringing me up like that to say 'Now we know what's next.'" He shook his head. "It isn't helpful, sir. It isn't like you either."

"Yes, I think so. I wasn't pulling your leg, Bell. I was humbly suggestin' you weren't taking things seriously."

"Well now, I didn't think to hear that from you, sir! That's like the papers. You know we can't do miracles. The only way to work the case is inquiries about the expert burglars who might have done it. It's a slow business, but Pargo's sharp enough and he's got all the men he can use."

"On the moonstones?"

"Something more than moonstones to think about now, isn't there? But I reckon if we can get the man who had the moonstones we'll have the man who did the other jobs."

"You think so?"

"Why, isn't that what you said yourself, sir? 'I wonder what's next' after the moonstones and 'Now we know what's next' after Lady Silvertown's diamonds were taken. You were always thinking the moonstone case was a fellow getting his hand in."

"Was I?" Mr. Fortune murmured. "I didn't say so. No, if I was a crack burglar who knew how to put his hand on diamond necklaces and diamond tiaras I wouldn't bother with a young doctor's wife."

"Do you mean that wasn't a burglary, sir?"

"No. Oh no. It was a burglary all right. Up the drain pipe. Fine climbing."

"Well, there you are!" Bell cried. "It wasn't worth doing, but it was done."

"Yes. It was done. That's what's so interesting."

"Look here, sir. If you didn't mean there'd be other burglaries, what did you mean with your 'what next'?"

"I meant it looked like leading to something. I didn't know what. I don't know now."

"It looked like a cat burglar getting to work again," said Bell. "That's pretty plain."

"Plain!" Mr. Fortune murmured. "Oh, Peter! Plain! You haven't caught anybody, have you?"

"You see we have to go by facts, sir," Bell smiled. "That makes us so slow. Pargo's had two old hands held for inquiries. Both of them put up good alibis."

"Oh, yes. There would be alibis. And that's all you've got? Two nice healthy alibis!"

"Well, I don't mind telling you there is another bit of work doing. Pargo's got a line on a fellow who's going to have a lot to explain."

"Which case?" said Mr. Fortune sharply.

Bell smiled. "When we've found the man who did one there won't be any complaints."

Mr. Fortune sank back in his chair.

"It beats me what you're worrying about," Bell cried.

Mr. Fortune made an odd gesture. His hands moved in the air as if he were trying to grasp something unpleasant. "It's queer," he murmured. "Don't you feel it, Bell? It's queer."

"Good Lord!" Bell grinned. "No, sir, not me. You're seeing things. You will try to see what isn't there."

"You think so? Well, well. Let me know when you get the next alibi."

But it was Mrs. Davis who brought him into the

case again. Two days afterwards he was adjudicating upon some burgundy (a question between Musigny and Richebourg) when he heard her voice, opened the dining-room door and beckoned her in. She came like a leaf on the wind. "Oh, Mr. Fortune, have you heard? Oh!" She saw the wine and was shocked.

"I am always being misunderstood," said Mr. Fortune sadly.

"Two bottles of wine in the afternoon!"

"This is a scientific investigation, Doris. One chooses the most placid hour."

"One is rather a pig," said Doris, putting up a little nose.

"My poor child," Mr. Fortune murmured. "You can't help being a woman, but you shouldn't be proud of it."

"Oh, don't be silly! Mr. Fortune, they've found my moonstones."

"Well, well," said Mr. Fortune: and turned away and put a chair for her with mathematical precision.

"I've just been to Scotland Yard to identify them. They are my moonstones. And who do you think took them? They say it was a chauffeur who lived in the mews. And we know him, Mr. Fortune! Such a nice man. I can't believe it. He drives for the Durand garage. We often have a car from there and he generally takes us. I can't imagine

it was him. But they say the moonstones were found in his locker at the garage and I shall have to go into the witness-box and say he did it." Mr. Fortune's dreamy eyes opened. She went on fast and a little shrill: "Don't you see? He's always been so nice. It's horrid getting him into trouble."

"You aren't. You're only saying your moonstones are yours. I'm afraid you'll have to do that."

"That's what Bill says," she began to be pathetic. "I did think you'd be able to help me, Mr. Fortune."

"I'll go down to the court with you. I'll have another look at the case."

"I almost wish they hadn't got the things back. That detective said he didn't think they would."

"Yes, yes. He was wrong there," Mr. Fortune murmured, watching her with large, solemn eyes.

"Oh, you make me quite frightened!" she cried.

"Not me. No. I'm only seeing fair," said Mr. Fortune. But he had some trouble in getting rid of her. It was an agitated woman whom he deposited in her own house before he drove off to Scotland Yard.

There Superintendent Bell beamed widely upon him. "Hallo, sir! Have you seen your little lady lately?"

"This isn't kind, Bell. It isn't quite nice. You were going to let me know when you caught anybody else. Now you gloat."

"Well, sir, you had your bit of fun with me.

We haven't found another alibi. Not this time. Has the lady told you? "

"She says you've been and pinched her nice chauffeur."

"And got her moonstones. She wasn't what you'd call grateful, either. Kind of peevish." Bell gave a large indulgent sigh. "You never know with the ladies."

"You think not? Well, well. How did you get him? "

"You'd better see Pargo, sir. He's made a neat job of it."

Inspector Pargo came, brisk and smiling. His quick eyes glanced from his superintendent to Mr. Fortune and back again. "Mr. Fortune wants to hear all about it, Pargo."

"I'm very glad we've been able to get the lady's jewels. That's a bit of luck I didn't count on." He chuckled. "I'm afraid we won't put our hands on the diamonds. They'll be in Amsterdam by now. But it's Dr. Davis's case you're interested in, of course. There was a fellow I've been looking for some time. Since those burglaries in the spring." He glanced at Bell. "But I couldn't get a trace of him. Just before the war there was a fellow we caught on a job in Mayfair. The Squirrel, they called him. Real name Tom Briggs. Started life as an electrician and took to burglary. He turned out a first-class hand at the cat game.

Several jobs I know he was in, but we only got him once and then they let him off with a light sentence for a first offence. He came out of prison and we lost sight of him. War time, you know. When we had these fresh cases I started looking for the Squirrel again and after a bit I heard he'd been seen working at the Durand garage. There he was, bold as brass, but not as Tom Briggs, oh no, he was Mr. Jim Bayliss. He'd got his job with a character in that name from a Major Denham that died before the character was written. And his little home is in the mews at the back of Mrs. Davis's house. I had Jim Bayliss detained, took his finger-prints, found he was the Squirrel right enough and sent a man round to search his place. He kept nothing at home. But in his locker at the garage there were the moonstones done up in a bit of rag and some neat little burglar's tools. That's the case, sir. We've got the real goods this time. See how it all fits in ? "

" No. No. Not exactly," said Mr. Fortune. " It isn't my sort of case."

" Well, sir, it's a matter of piecing things together. Here's this chap, a crack burglar, gets a job at a big West End garage. Why ? It puts him in the know about all the people that hire from there, like Mrs. Davis. Waiting at theatres and balls he's in touch with the chauffeurs of all the rich folks in London, like Lord Silvertown. That puts him up

to their little ways and when they'll be out at night. Then he's got a good car to use and a fine excuse for hanging about with it. He'd just drive up, watch till the coast was clear, do his job, and pop off in the car—and a nice little home handy in the West End to go to. Oh, he's a smart man, the Squirrel."

"Yes. What's he say about it?"

"Not a word. He knows the game. He don't give anything away." Inspector Pargo winked. "If he got talking he might happen to put us on to the diamonds. He don't mean to lose them. He'll take what's coming to him and collect for the diamonds when he comes out. Worth waiting for. He'll have to wait though. He's booked for a long stretch."

"I don't quite see," Mr. Fortune said meekly. "What's the evidence in the diamond cases, Pargo?"

Inspector Pargo glanced at his superintendent. "If you have three cat burglaries all close in a week and you catch the man that did one, that's pretty good evidence who did the others, Mr. Fortune."

"Yes. You can say that to me. You won't be able to say it to a judge."

"I know that, sir. There's a lot of evidence that isn't evidence in court. I can't charge him with the other two cases. But when he's convicted I

shall be satisfied." His quick eyes consulted Superintendent Bell.

"Not much doubt," Bell nodded. "He won't be the first fellow that only took sentence for one crime when we knew he did more. You've seen that in your time, Mr. Fortune?"

"Yes. Yes. An unjust world."

"It'll work out all right, sir," Pargo said quickly. "We'll prove the one case, but the jury will have the others in their minds and so will the judge. The Squirrel will get a good stiff sentence."

"Oh my aunt!" Mr. Fortune murmured and sat up. "Justice: a theory. By Inspector Pargo." He contemplated that dapper man with smiling curiosity.

"Well, sir, I think it's justice to stop a run of burglaries. And you'll see I've done it, Mr. Fortune."

"I wonder," Mr. Fortune murmured. "Well, well. Au revoir." He strolled out.

What he did next was to ring up Dr. Davis. "Halloa, Bill. Fortune speaking. I'll drive Doris down to the police court in the morning. You coming?"

The voice which answered suggested that Doris's husband found life difficult. Doris was rather upset. She didn't want to appear against the man. Was it really necessary to go on with the case?

"I don't know how you're going to drop it," said Mr. Fortune.

The voice gloomily supposed not. Well, Doris should go if she was fit. He was going too, of course. But it was very decent of Fortune.

"She'd better be fit," said Mr. Fortune.

She was. A tense and angry little woman with a glum husband entered Mr. Fortune's big car. At the police court Inspector Pargo met her all smiles. "We shan't keep you long, Mrs. Davis. Your evidence is just a matter of form and—what, Mr. Fortune! Are you giving evidence, too?" he chuckled.

"No. I'm just seeing fair, Pargo."

The politeness of Inspector Pargo allowed him a moment's stare. "Oh, Mrs. Davis will be all right, sir," he said.

They went into court. Thomas Briggs was put in the dock. The solicitor for the police arose. He did not think the charges would detain the court long. Probably his worship would consider it was a case for a jury. The prisoner——

But Mr. Fortune was not listening. He lay back looking with curious intensity at Thomas Briggs. "The prisoner," as the reporters say, "seemed to feel his position acutely." He was a slim erect fellow with strength in his shoulders, neatly turned out in spite of his night in the cells. He could not stand still, though he kept his right hand gripping

the rail of the dock. He turned this way and that, looking round the court, now anxiously, more often with a fierce curiosity, and he had a fighting chin. But it was not his face that Mr. Fortune studied.

A detective-sergeant was in the witness-box. Proceeding to 18 Holland Street on the 6th on information that a burglary had been committed there, he found that a second-floor room had been entered through the window by climbing a drain pipe. On calling at the Durand Garage he had seen the prisoner acting as a chauffeur under the name of James Bayliss and recognized him as Tom Briggs convicted of cat burglary in 1913: found that he had made use of a forged character, searched his locker and found there burglar's tools and a set of moonstones.

"It's not true," a woman screamed.

The prisoner flushed, gulped, put his left hand to his collar and fumbled to ease it. "God knows it ain't true," he said. His hand fell and the arm hung bent.

Mrs. Davis was called. Mrs. Davis had often been driven by the prisoner. Mrs. Davis came home on the night of the 5th to find that her bedroom had been entered and her moonstones taken. The moonstones produced were hers. Thank you, Mrs. Davis.

On this evidence—justified in asking—commit prisoner for trial.

"Anything to say, Briggs?"

"I have, sir." The man in the dock stood to attention. "What he says about me doing time, that's true. But I've gone straight since, so help me God. When I came out of clink I joined up, name of Bayliss, being mother's name and me wanting to do my bit. I served with the Rutlands, second battalion. You can get my record all right and there's them as would speak for me. When I was demobbed, Major Denham he took me on as chauffeur. But he went west in that French railway smash in 1920 and I was down and out. So I wrote myself a character from him and got on with Durands'. And I been straight with Durands, they'll tell you that. I kept off the old game and never saw none of the lads till this spring when one of 'em"—he turned fiercely on the detective sergeant—"if you know so much you know the Slug—he came to me at my little place and began to talk about a job he had for me. I slung him out quick. That's all I ever had to do with the old game since I did my bit of time. So help me; I thought I'd wiped it all off. How the swag came into my box at Durands' I can't tell no more than a baby. The swine that put the cops on to me he knows all about that."

"It's a case for a jury, Briggs," the magistrate said. "You should have a lawyer, you know. Better have a lawyer."

"I never done it, sir," Briggs said sullenly. "I know I'm for it. You can't fight the cops. But I never done it."

Mr. Fortune, watching him with scientific interest, was nudged by Bill Davis. "I say, Doris wants to get out of this."

"Oh, ah. Take her to the car. I shan't be long." He slid out of court.

When they saw him next he was coming out of a post office. The agitation of Mrs. Davis was not subdued by waiting. She tried to hide that she was crying by a voice of bitterness and spite. "I hope you're satisfied, Mr. Fortune."

Mr. Fortune smiled. "No, Doris. Not satisfied. But very interested." He turned to her husband. "Well, Bill, what about it?" he said briskly.

"It's a miserable business, Fortune."

"Oh, yes. Quite. What did you make of the man?"

"Poor devil! I don't know what to think. I believe he really meant to keep straight."

"Of course he did," Doris cried. "I hate your horrid policemen, Mr. Fortune!"

"Yes. Yes. I wasn't asking for kind sympathy. I wanted a medical opinion, Bill."

"Medical?" Dr. Davis stared. "I didn't see anything—the man's suffering from nervous strain of course—that's to be expected. He's quite normal."

Mr. Fortune sighed. "My poor Bill! And I once tried to teach you anatomy!"

"I don't know what anatomy has got to do with it."

"Oh, hush!" said Mr. Fortune.

Dr. Davis began to ask what he meant, but was overwhelmed by his wife: "Mr. Fortune, you think there's something—something——" The car stopped.

"Oh yes, there's quite a lot," said Mr. Fortune, and opened the door and handed her out. "Good-bye. Scotland Yard, Sam."

He found Superintendent Bell in conference with Inspector Pargo. "Thinkin' second thoughts, Pargo?" he smiled.

Pargo laughed. "It's the Squirrel that's got to think again, isn't it? He didn't cut much ice with that gallery stuff this morning."

"Ah, I wouldn't say that. He wasn't talking to the gallery."

"Then I don't know who he was talking to," Pargo sneered.

"God," said Mr. Fortune.

Again Pargo laughed. "More fool he. God knows all about it."

"That'll do, Pargo." Bell was shocked. "You've got something to put to us, Mr. Fortune?"

"Yes. You'd better go into the case."

Pargo sat forward. "You'll excuse me, sir, I

have. It's clear evidence and he's got no answer. I'd like to know what you mean."

"Well, several things. For instance, you didn't mention he'd served in the war."

"I didn't know he had."

"Oh, but you said you'd gone into the case! It's time somebody did, Bell. You might look up his regimental record, 2nd Rutlandshires."

Bell nodded and made a note. "That's all very well," Pargo cried. "I dare say he did his bit. Lots of old lags did. But I'm here to put down crime. And a burglar's a burglar."

"Yes. Once a burglar always a burglar. That's the hopeful sort of argument that got you into this mess."

"I see no mess. We've got him sent to trial with a clear case."

"For a buglary he didn't commit. Yes. Very pleasant all round."

"Ha, that's pretty good!" Pargo cried. "I suppose you saw him not doing it?"

"No. I only saw he couldn't do it," said Mr. Fortune. "Didn't you notice that? Well, well. His left arm is bent at the elbow and stiff. His left hand won't close. There's some injury to the muscles and nerves, probably from a wound in the war. You should have thought of that. It's impossible for that man to cross from Mrs. Davis's drain pipe to her window"

"Good Lord, sir," Bell said and smiled a rueful smile. "That's torn it, Pargo."

"How do you know he wasn't shamming?" Pargo cried.

"I know, thank you," Mr. Fortune murmured.

"If he's got a weak arm, he'd have said so. He'd have been the poor wounded soldier who couldn't do a cat burglary for his life. You bet he would."

"And he said nothing. Yes. That's what clears him. He knows he can still climb. He knows he could do a cat burglary. What he doesn't know is that he couldn't do this one. He doesn't know he'd have to hang by his left hand getting from the pipe to the window." Mr. Fortune gazed at Inspector Pargo with a slow benign smile. "That proves he wasn't on this job, you see."

"Does it show how the moonstones got in his box?"

"No. No. That seems to be up to you."

"What do you mean?" Pargo cried. "If that's meant for me it ought to be plain." He appealed to his superintendent. "Mr. Fortune heard the sergeant swear he found the moonstones in the man's locker. I want to know what he's hinting at."

"You're so touchy," Mr. Fortune murmured. "I'm hinting there's a lot we don't know. Do you know the Slug?"

"The Slug? What's that?" Bell said quickly.

"My God!" Inspector Pargo was overcome. "If you're taking what that fellow said for gospel, you have got a job on." He gazed at Mr. Fortune with pity and contempt and turned to his superintendent. "It's the Squirrel telling the tale in the dock that's got Mr. Fortune. The usual stuff. One of his old pals has a down on him because he was trying to live honest and wouldn't go back to the old lay. Lord! How many times have we heard that!"

"I've heard it when it was true," Bell said. "Some chap he called the Slug came to him, eh? You don't know who he meant?"

"Not me. Never heard the name before. I know most of 'em too."

"You'll have to go into it," Bell pronounced. "See if any of your men have heard of the Slug. If some of 'em remember the chaps this fellow used to work with you might get a line. It wants working, Pargo. I don't like the case. Better get busy."

"Very good, sir." Inspector Pargo went out like a lamb—a brisk lamb.

Bell stared heavily at Mr. Fortune. "He's a bit hard, is Pargo," he sighed. "Don't seem to feel things. It hampers him."

"Yes. Yes I thought that," Mr. Fortune smiled.

"But he's sharp, you know. And he does work."

"Yes, that's what I am afraid of," said Mr. Fortune. "Not a nice case, Bell. Not a nice case at all."

"I'll watch it, sir," Bell assured him.

Mr. Fortune smiled. When he came out to the courtyard his car had no chauffeur. He exhibited no surprise and drove himself away.

On the next day Mrs. Davis was shown into his consulting-room. "Oh, Mr. Fortune, I only wanted to ask you—the magistrate said that poor man ought to have a lawyer—and he hasn't any money, of course—I thought perhaps we could get a lawyer for him. Bill says we oughtn't, we're prosecuting him. But I'm not really, am I? I don't see why I shouldn't help him to get off."

"Don't worry. He's got a lawyer. I sent him one yesterday."

"You? Oh, Mr. Fortune, you are kind." She was prettily affected. But Mr. Fortune stared at her with solemn eyes. "Oh, oh well, that was all," she faltered. "Thank you ever so much. I'm sure you're dreadfully busy."

He did not deny it. He showed her out and when he came back to the consulting-room took up the paper that was tossed behind his desk, that paper of the million, the *Daily Echo*.

What interested him in it was a small advertisement:

Lothario third. Blue eyes. Case altered. Auntie gone to grass. Wrong number again. Take slip or cover.

He studied those remarkable sentences for some time, then copied them out in a large hand and continued his studies.

After a while he took another sheet of paper and with some difficulty worked out this composition :

Lothario third. Blue eyes. Nothing in it. Doing auntie proud. Meet all off. Sweetbread on the pounce. Bought the street. Lay him ten to one or nothing. Some biff.

He frowned at it dissatisfaction. But having made experiments on it which pleased him no better, put it in his pocket and rang for a taxi and drove to the office of the *Daily Echo*. Thereafter he conferred with the inquiry agent who had once been Inspector Mordan, but emerged pensive.

In that state he remained, to his cook's anxiety, and it was after a meagre breakfast next day that his telephone called Superintendent Bell.

Bell came briskly into the consulting-room to find him sitting on the small of his back under much cigar smoke. " I wanted to have a chat with you, sir. You were right about that fellow's arm."

" Fancy," Mr. Fortune murmured.

" I had the prison doctor look at it. The arm's all weak and wasted. And we've turned up his record. He was in the Rutlands all right. Stopped some shrapnel at Cambrai. That clears him,

doesn't it? We've made a bad break. What beats me is why his pals tried to put the job on him when he was sure to get off."

"Oh no, he wasn't He didn't know he couldn't have done it. If I hadn't seen the window you'd never have known. But I don't think the chap who put the moonstones in his locker knew he'd been wounded."

"I see. Just doing the dirty on him because he was living respectable? That's a regular crook's trick."

"Yes. It's all highly professional. Yes. What about his friend the Slug?"

"Pargo can't make anything of that, sir. Nobody seems to know the name. Can't get a line on him at all."

"I'm always telling you to read the papers. Ever hear of the *Daily Echo*? Nice paper for an infant school. But it doesn't get many agony advertisements. Yesterday it only got this."

Bell frowned over those cryptic sentences.

Lothario third. Blue eyes. Case altered. Auntie gone to grass. Wrong number again. Take slip or cover.

"What are you giving me, sir?" he grinned. "Some flapper and her best boy playing the fool, isn't it?"

"You think so? There was another one printed this morning."

Bell read out:

Lothario third. Blue eyes. Nothing in it. Doing auntie proud. Meet all off. Sweetbread on the pounce. Bought the street. Lay him ten to one or nothing. Some biff.

"'Sweetbread on the pounce,'" he repeated. 'Feeling skittish, eh?"

"I wasn't," said Mr. Fortune with indignation.

"Good Lord, sir. You wrote it?"

"Only the second. I thought I'd like to give a helpin' hand. 'Sweetbread on the pounce.' Yes, it is a little obvious. But I wanted to be quite clear."

"Clear! That isn't what I'd call it. Some cipher you've got at, is it?"

"Yes, I think so. 'Lothario' is the address. The key is 'third.' Take every third word. 'Case—gone—wrong—take—cover.' To which I sent the answer 'Nothing—doing—meet—sweetbread—Pounce—Street—ten—or—biff.' See?"

"I do not, sir," said Bell with decision.

"Oh, my dear fellow. But it's quite simple. Some fellow was being warned that the case against the Squirrel had gone wrong and he'd better take cover. So I thought it would do good to answer in his name that there was nothing doing. He must have a meeting at the Sweetbread—that's the Ris de Veau, a little French restaurant—or biff—he'd blow up the whole concern."

"What's the idea, sir?"

"The idea is that the case against the Squirrel was put up to cover the man who did the diamond burglaries. You know if you'd got the Squirrel convicted you wouldn't have looked for anyone else."

"It's a bit too clever for me, Mr. Fortune," Bell said slowly.

"Yes. It's a gamble."

"You don't know if it's anything to do with the cat burglaries?"

"No, not yet. But I want you to come and dine with me at the Ris de Veau."

Bell laughed. "Well, sir, I don't mind if I do. No harm in it, but it's all fancy."

"No. Quite a nice dinner Half-past eight? Right. Don't tell anybody."

"Not me, sir," Bell chuckled. "I'd never hear the last of it."

The Ris de Veau shows a little window like a shop on a narrow street in Soho. Within, it is a place of holes and corners. Superintendent Bell on the stroke of half-past eight found it noisy and bustling. A fat man with the whiskers of a French farce loomed round the piles of fruit on the counter and smiled at him and pointed to a table in a recess behind the door hidden from any man who came in till he was well inside. There Mr. Fortune welcomed him. "I thought we wanted comfort, Bell. Crayfish soup, plain red mullet, their own

particular sweetbread which is luscious, and an *entrecôte*. Anything in that against your principles?"

"You know all about a dinner, sir," Bell grinned, "but it's not a place a crook would come to, to my mind."

"You think not? Well, well. They keep a fair Corton. Fill the cup that clears to-day of past regrets and future fears. Don't you like olives? What a life!" He discoursed seriously of food. And they dined well and at length, and the company dwindled, but no anxious gentleman looking for a friend appeared. When they had come to the peaches Bell began to fire off some heavy jokes. Nice quiet place to bring your lady friends, the Ris de Veau, but Lothario didn't seem to be coming along with Blue eyes. Perhaps he wasn't much of a hand at cipher. Perhaps Mr. Fortune had rung up the wrong number. . . .

It was long after ten, no one remained at the tables but themselves and a couple of artists with model complete in the latest fashions of Chelsea. "How late are we staying, sir?" Bell grinned. "Looks to me Lothario's turned you down."

"Have you got a man outside?" said Mr. Fortune quickly.

"Not me. I don't draw blanks more than I can help. It's bad for discipline. If you don't mind my saying so, Mr. Fortune, this was a bit hopeful,

this stunt. You see you never knew you were on to the cat-burglary case at all."

Somewhere a clock struck eleven. "Well, well," said Mr. Fortune and rose. "Thank you for a very pleasant evening."

They went out to a quiet dark street and parted.

Mr. Fortune had gone some little way when a man crossed the street behind him. He became aware of it as a blow was aimed at his head. He went down on his face like dead man.

There was a scurry of running feet. The still body was turned and lifted. "Go after him, you fool," Mr. Fortune gasped. He was let fall to the pavement again and the feet fled away.

A police whistle screamed, the heavier feet of Superintendent Bell arrived. "Did they get you, sir?" he panted as he knelt, but Mr. Fortune lay silent. "My God!" Bell groaned and blew his whistle again and took the limp arm and fumbled for the pulse. . . .

People were coming out of the houses, constables lumbered up. . . .

The body was borne away in an ambulance. Bell went with it to the hospital, saw it carried in with respectful care and turned to meet a brisk young doctor. "It's Mr. Fortune, Mr. Reginald Fortune. Been knocked on the head by a couple of crooks."

"Some of 'em getting a bit of their own back?" that young man grinned.

"I'm counting on you to do your best, sir?" said Bell solemnly.

"Oh, we'll do him proud."

He bent professionally over the body and started. Mr. Fortune's lips had whispered "Get rid of the nurse." That busy woman was given an errand which surprised her. Mr. Fortune sat up and smiled. "Yes, we have no concussion," he said. "Only a deuce of a bruise of the right shoulder-blade. Sorry to bother you. But I want it given out Mr. Reginald Fortune was brought to the hospital with serious injuries. Only that and nothing more. If any newspaper chaps come asking questions, just say that and look wise, what?"

"Can do, sir," the young surgeon grinned.

"Now, Bell, if you'll just telephone that to the newspapers our young friend'll get me quietly out of the hospital."

"I'm going to take you home, sir."

"You can put me to bed if you like. After you've told our able and enterprising Press."

When they were driving away in a taxi, "You gave me a pretty start, Mr. Fortune," Bell reproached him. "What's the idea of lying low?"

"The same idea, same old idea. I want to know what's coming next. Something rather recherché if it was worth while knocking me on the head first. Why did they want me out of action? The Squirrel case is broken down anyway. If they think I'm

in hospital we'll have the next move good and quick."

"Do you know who hit you, sir?"

"No. No. I only knew he was there when he hit. I dropped as he swung, or I should have had it on the head. Only the end of the blow got me. Quite enough," he wriggled uncomfortably. "Good heavy life-preserver he used."

"But there were two of them in it. One had you after you fell. Didn't you get a look at him, sir?"

"Oh, that was Mordan. Silly ass. He ought to have caught the beggar."

"Mordan? You've put him on the case? You don't trust us much, sir."

"Well, you know, I did think our friend Pargo wanted a little help. Here we are. Come in, Bell. Another little drink wouldn't do you any harm."

"Not me, sir. I've had enough, thank you."

"Oh, my Bell. You're not cross with me?"

Superintendent Bell in a firm voice directed the taxi to Scotland Yard. "Well, well. Let me know what happens next," said Mr. Fortune.

It came in the morning, it came while Mr. Fortune, eating his late breakfast, received a report of Inspector Mordan's operations from the mouth of his chauffeur. The telephone rang. Bell was speaking. "How are you this morning, sir?"

"Sitting up and taking nourishment. Have you got anything?"

"Not about your business, sir. But it's a funny thing, there was another cat burglary last night. Westington way. House of Mr. Maple Vansittart. The chap didn't get away with it this time."

"How's that?" said Mr. Fortune quickly.

"Had a fall, sir. Picked up dead in the back garden this morning."

"Well, well," said Mr. Fortune and turned to his chauffeur. "They've found the fellow dead in the garden, Sam."

"My oath!" Sam muttered.

"What's that, sir?" the telephone asked.

"Now we know what was coming next, Bell. Anybody seen the corpse?"

"Local men say the chap broke his neck, sir. Pargo's gone up to the mortuary. The divisional surgeon's doing a post-mortem."

"What's the matter with me?"

"Well, sir, you're in the Piccadilly Hospital badly hurt."

"Stick to that. But come round with a couple of hefty men." Mr. Fortune hung up the receiver. . . .

Superintendent Bell's car drove up. Two large men packed beside the chauffeur gazed solemn surprise at Mr. Fortune, swift and intact.

"What are we doing now, sir?" said Bell.

"Superintendent Bell is goin' to clear up a very nasty business."

"Is he? You don't mind my saying so, Mr. Fortune, but I do like to be trusted."

"Oh, Bell. Oh, my Bell. I trusted you with everything last night. You could have given the whole show away. You're coming out all right."

"Thank you very much, sir." Bell was ruffled. "I don't want any compliments, but it beats me why you can't talk plain."

"Well, do you know anything about Mr. Maple Vansittart?"

"Never heard of him before."

"No. You haven't heard of him. Had Pargo?"

"He didn't know the name at all."

Mr. Fortune laughed.

The car stopped at the mortuary. Bell went in first and behind him Mr. Fortune. Just inside the doorway they met Inspector Pargo. "Hallo, sir, you've come along?" he said briskly. "It's what they told us. The surgeon says there's no doubt——"

"Does he though?" Mr. Fortune came round Bell's shoulder.

Inspector Pargo stopped talking and stared at him.

"Yes. You didn't mean me to see the body, did you?" Mr. Fortune said.

Inspector Pargo licked his lips. "The superintendent said you were in hospital, sir. Very glad you're better, I'm sure. The divisional surgeon's

in there with the body. You'll excuse me, sir, I have to get round to the house."

"No. Oh no. You've got another engagement. Don't let him break away, Bell."

"You stand fast," Bell took a grip of the man. "What is all this, Mr. Fortune?"

"Oh, Pargo's the man that knocked me out last night."

"Good Lord. Do you charge him, sir?"

"That'll do to go on with. There'll be other charges all right."

"I don't know what you mean," Pargo stammered. "I never——"

"Why talk?" said Mr. Fortune. "Mordan saw you. He saw you somewhere else too. Ah, look after his hands, Bell."

Bell wrenched a pistol out of the man's pocket. "Like that, eh, Pargo?" he said. "You fool." He nodded to the two large men in the doorway and Inspector Pargo was marched out. "My God, Mr. Fortune, what is this game?"

"Not a nice man, Bell. Not at all a nice man, but he isn't the devil. Well, well. Lock him up and come back. I'll go and have a look at the poor beggar who paid his bill last night."

The divisional surgeon was surprised and not pleased to see Mr. Fortune. There was nothing in the case. The man's neck was broken. Obviously by a fall. He had been found lying in the garden

of a four-story house. Some burglar's tools on him. Scratches on one of the upper windows and the drain pipe. Quite clear what happened. Fellow climbed up, slipped, fell and was killed. "Yes, very lucid. . . ." Mr. Fortune murmured, bent over the body. "Very neat. . . . But there's no injury anywhere except on the head. That's very unusual. And there—and there there's too many."

"I don't understand you, Mr. Fortune."

"Oh, but it's quite simple. He didn't have a fall. He was dead before he was put in the garden. Just have a look at those bruises on the head again. Good-bye."

Bell was waiting outside. What now, sir?"

"Last act. Mr. Maple Vansittart at home."

"Why, that's the gentleman that was burgled. What's he got to do with it?"

"Oh, Bell!" said Mr. Fortune sadly. "Oh, my Bell! He wasn't burgled. There wasn't a burglary. That fellow wasn't killed by a fall. He was stunned by a life-preserver. Same like I ought to have been. Then they broke his neck bending his head back and back."

"They? Who do you mean they, sir?"

"Well, you'd better ask Mr. Maple Vansittart. That poor devil went into his house last night. Mordan's men saw him go in. But he didn't come out again. Not by the front door."

"But who is he, sir?"

"I'm afraid he's Lothario," said Mr. Fortune gravely. "I'm sorry. Not a nice case, Bell. Come on."

The house of Mr. Maple Vansittart stood in a quiet suburban by-way, one of a row of plain Victorian dignity embowered in gardens. A man opened the door, a plump man, consisting chiefly of body, who terminated in a dark shiny face with no features to speak of. "I am a police officer, Superintendent Bell. I've come to see Mr. Maple Vansittart."

The man stared a moment. "This way, sir," he said and showed them into a room which looked out on the street. "I will tell Mr. Vansittart," and he shut the door on them.

By the door Mr. Fortune waited listening "What's the matter, sir?" Bell whispered.

"Well, I think we've found the Slug," Mr. Fortune smiled. "And I think Mr. Maple Vansittart don't live downstairs." He opened the door and went into the passage. Another door below opened and shut. Mr. Fortune led the way to the back room. From the window he saw the Slug running across the garden. Bell hoisted himself over the sill. "Don't worry. The back door's watched," said Mr. Fortune and as the Slug opened it he shouted, "Take that man." The Slug arrived into the competent arms of Inspector Mordan's men. "Yes. Mr. Maple Vansittart's being coy. I'm afraid we'll

have to look for him by hand." He glanced round the room, a place of fine taste and many treasures, Empire furniture, a Chinese carpet, a table of rococo jewels, a Fragonard child, a Boucher nymph. "He's done himself well," said Mr. Fortune sadly. "The beast."

Bell was not attending. Bell was out at the front door. One of his men was to watch it, the other go through the house with him. On their heels Mr. Fortune followed. It was a wonderful house. Mr. Maple Vansittart guided a catholic love of beautiful things by a sense of harmony. Every room had treasures of furniture and he set them off by pictures and china and fabrics that made the best of them. . . . With reverent and covetous eyes Mr. Fortune wandered about the room with the bed of Louis-Quinze and the Greuze and the tapestries and the beautiful clock, but Mr. Maple Vansittart was not there. He was in none of his charming rooms.

They came to the top landing. Bell's man swung himself up into the cistern loft. There was a shout, a scuffle, he appeared dragging after him a little man all dust and cobwebs, a little man who panted and shook as he was lowered by the scruff of his neck into Bell's arms.

"Yes. You would be like that," said Mr. Fortune.

The little man brushed at himself and revealed under dirt and smears a neat little grey

beard and moustache, a velvet coat and flowing tie.

"Mr. Maple Vansittart, I presume?" Bell asked.

"I don't understand you," his teeth chattered, "let me go, please." He made futile efforts to get away from Bell's grip.

"Stand still. I'm Superintendent Bell. You're under arrest."

"Me? Oh no, no. You don't mean that. Why should I be arrested?"

"For murder," said Mr. Fortune.

"But that's absurd——"

"Better hold your tongue," Bell broke in. "Anything you say will be used against you. You know that."

"My dear sir, you don't understand. It wasn't me. It was Pargo."

"You little rat," said Bell.

Mr. Maple Vansittart shrank and his knees were loosened. It was necessary to carry him, a twittering, miserable creature, to the car.

"And that thing was the brains of it all," Mr. Fortune said wearily. "Well, well. A queer world."

"How do you mean the brains of it, sir?"

"Oh, don't you see now? He's the managing director of your cat burglaries. He found out where the stuff was and arranged the operations and disposed of the swag. I don't know when he made

contact with Pargo, but I dare say you'll find that going through his pass-book. That simplified things, of course, but it wasn't enough. If you had recurring crops of cat burglaries and nobody was ever caught, there'd be nasty questions for Pargo."

"There have been, sir. Mr. Lomas made a bit of a fuss over these cases in the spring."

"Yes. That's why Pargo had to catch a man when they started business again. So our friend the Slug was put on to the Squirrel. Their error. They ought to have found out the fellow had a game arm. But they'd have brought it off all right if I hadn't happened to know Mrs. Davis. Pargo worked it quite neatly. If the Squirrel had been convicted everybody would have believed he was the fellow who did those other burglaries. But that's what struck me. It was all so nice for Inspector Pargo. And I put old Mordan on to watch him and found he was running off to Mr Maple Vansittart. Then came the advertisement. I knew Pargo had been to the advertisement office of the *Daily Echo*. Nothing in that of course. But it was interesting. So I looked for anything unusual and I found Lothario third and put in my little answer." He looked at Bell gravely. "I'm sorry. You see how it was. They were warning the poor chap who did the burglaries to run for it when he thought he was safe. Then he saw my advertisement too and was more rattled. He came up to

Vansittart to know what it all meant. Pargo was here too. They were all scared. I suppose the burglar turned rusty and they laid him out. Then somebody had a brain wave. They had him stunned on their hands, they didn't know what was coming next, why not break his neck and make him into a cat burglar who'd had a fall in his business? If they had any luck left that'd clear it all up. Then Pargo hustled off to the Ris de Veau to see who was on the job there and he saw me. He knew if I had a look at his corpse the game was up. If he could keep me out of it, he would be able to work the divisional surgeon all right. So he had a smack at my head. The last chance. And he thought he'd brought it off. I wonder how he felt when he saw me this morning?"

"Like a lost soul," said Bell.

"Yes, I think so," Mr. Fortune said gravely. They passed slowly down the stairs of that silent house. By the room of the Louis-Quinze bed and the tapestries of pink and gold, Mr. Fortune stopped. "Charming, isn't it, charming? And Mr. Maple Vansittart was sleeping there while poor devils were doing burglaries and Pargo was selling his soul to keep him nice and comfortable. A queer world, Bell."

"He'll pay," said Bell fiercely.

"Oh my aunt!" Mr. Fortune murmured. "How can he pay?"

THE LION PARTY

INVITED to the cottage by the chalk stream from which the Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department is wont to take trout, Mr. Reginald Fortune said modestly that he was going to Lady Marshbaldon's for the week-end.

"This," said Lomas with reverence, "this is indeed fame. Like getting into the picture papers. This is the reward for your evidence in the camp case."

"Yes, I think so," Reggie smiled. The conviction of the brigade-major is ranked by him as good work. It was gruesome.

"Has she asked the murderer too?" said Lomas.

Lady Marshbaldon has a huge appetite for people who are being talked about. That week is a failure to her in which she has not a lion party, and at a lion party of hers may be met a cardinal and a film star, the last *divorcée* and the next prime minister. Mr. Fortune does not share her taste for the famous, having derived from a varied experience of life the conviction that the people who are talked about are seldom worth talking to. But it is a principle of his that one ought to try everything. He went.

Lady Marshbaldon's country house is within two hours of London if you have a clear run. Mr. Fortune had not. He started late, he would drive himself and there was a passage with a policeman which consumed much tact and time. So he came down to dinner when everybody else was drinking soup.

Lady Marshbaldon directed at him a complicated grimace, signifying that she was glad to see him, it was wicked of him to be so late and there was a place for him by that girl in black. The face of Lady Marshbaldon is extensive, in high relief, its mouth and brows are emphasized by art, it produces startling effects. A little short of breath, Mr. Fortune slid into his chair. The girl in black was busy with the man on her other side. Mr. Fortune tried his luck with the gaunt woman on his right. She had neither small talk nor manners. He sought comfort in the entrée vainly, he was looking round the table with that dreamy curiosity which well becomes his round face, when the girl in black turned and surveyed him. "Hallo! Happy days," she said, taking up her champagne.

"And many of 'em," Reggie murmured sadly as he drank. Champagne is no wine of his.

"Where did you spring from?"

"It's a long sad story," he shook his head. "There was a policeman. Why are policemen so hard?"

"Policeman?" She was startled. "I don't think! You look as if you'd just come down from the nursery."

"But there wouldn't be a nursery, would there?" Reggie asked meekly. "Not here?" He looked round Lady Marshbaldon's exuberant, variegated guests.

She was a girl who used one idea at a time. "You look just out of the egg," she laughed. "You look lost."

"Yes. I have a simple heart," Reggie agreed. "I don't think I know anybody."

She opened her eyes, pretty grey eyes too, if she had not darkened them so much, and the face was pretty enough to do without the paint it carried. She would have been charming on the stage. In a chorus. "What are you giving me?" she said and her voice was metallic. "Know Lady Marsh, don't you?"

"Oh yes. A long time. Quite a week. But the others—not one. And they're all lions, aren't they?"

"I should shay so," she laughed and drank up her champagne.

"It's very humiliating," said Reggie. He looked round the table. Taken as a crowd, the guests went very well with the girl in black. They looked like the smart society of a smart play. In general they were too much dressed and undressed. In detail each one was labouring to be remarkable.

Reggie's wistful eyes lingered on a little man in the only dinner jacket at table. He was so like a monkey. He was so pleased with himself. "I have seen him somewhere," Reggie murmured.

"Been to the Zoo lately?"

"One of our new nobility, isn't it?"

"Yes. Stop press. Jimmy the Chimp. Alias Lord Gilrea of Dope."

Reggie said he had heard of Lord Gilrea. He had not heard the nicknames. Herbert, first Lord Gilrea, came out of the north, borne by the booms and slumps of peace to famous wealth which he spent on many pleasures. The sort of man that sort of girl would know.

But she knew them all. "The frump in the diamonds," a crook of a finger indicated a dark homely woman with a wonderful glitter across her broad bosom, "that's Catalani, the new soprano."

"I've never heard her," said Reggie meekly.

"You will. You're for it. Scat my cats!"

"You don't care for music?"

"Jazz for mine. What's yours? Naughty, naughty. That's Lady V."

Reggie looked at a woman who would have been beautiful if her parents had given her a chin. He had to admire the dainty face that smiled at him. She smiled, to be sure, continuously. She matched the shell-pink roses on her breast.

"Keep that schoolgirl complexion," the girl

at his side chuckled. "That gets you, don't it? And all honest to God."

Reggie looked at her sadly. "Lady V.?" he inquired.

"Golly," said the girl. "Where did you blow in from? Lady V., world's record with the camera fiend. Close-ups and in costume and not so much of it, young fellow. And you don't know her! Oh boy! You go and tell her that after dinner. Break it gently, for mother's sake. Lady Vera Roche, she is."

Reggie sorted out vague memories of that professional beauty. "I was born young," he murmured, "quite young."

"You're too good to be true," she said sharply. "I suppose you don't know Gwent?"

Reggie looked at a solid young man making great play with the sweets. "The Duke of Gwent?" he said. "Isn't there a horse-race called the Derby? I think I heard the Duke of Gwent's horse won it."

"Come off it," the girl rebuked him, "it isn't funny."

"No. Not funny. Only interesting."

"What do you want to pull my leg for?"

"But I'm not. I wouldn't," Reggie protested. "I don't even know you."

"I'm Hilda Merton. Ever heard of me?"

Reggie gave her an embarrassed smile. "What do I say now?" he asked.

"You say who you are." She stared at him.

"My name's Fortune. Reginald Fortune."

That startled her. "You're not the Mr. Fortune——?" Her voice shrank to a whisper.

"Oh, I shouldn't think so. Just Mr. Fortune."

"You know," she said anxiously. "The one that gave evidence in that murder trial. The police expert."

"Yes. But don't let's talk shop."

She looked frightened. "You've had me on, haven't you?" she muttered.

"Oh surely not," Reggie smiled.

She gave him one more glance of fear and turned away to her other neighbour and began to chatter fast. The hands that peeled a pear did not quite know what they were doing. Reggie sighed in loneliness. The gaunt woman on his other side was expounding a new religion of which she appeared to be the founder. Reggie let himself wonder who Hilda Merton was and why she was frightened of policemen. A queer world. Lady Marshbaldon had a queer taste in lions—Gilrea, Lady Vera, the Duke of Gwent, the girl Hilda herself—rather cheap lions, night-club lions.

The women left the table. Hilda bent whispering to a boy as she passed and the boy turned and glanced at Mr. Fortune, showing a face mighty like her. The port went round, everybody seemed to know everybody, but the Duke of Gwent, who was

left next to Gilrea, exhibited all the signs of boredom and left his place and came round to Mr. Fortune. "I say, we've met somewhere, haven't we?" He had the smile of a friendly bulldog. "What are you doing here?"

"Looking on."

"Mixed bag, ain't we?" He glanced round the table and gave Mr. Fortune a catalogue of the party rather different from Hilda's. A Court functionary, the last explorer, a French soldier, a fashionable admiral, a shocking colonial artist. Lady Marshbaldon's taste in lions was well up to the advertisements. "Can't think where I've met you," said the Duke with frank curiosity. "Don't do much of this sort of thing, do you?"

"Not much. My name's Fortune."

The Duke sat forward. "I say, not the Fortune?"—he grinned all over his face—"not known to the police, what?"

"I'm afraid so," said Reggie sadly.

"The real big noise!" The Duke looked at him with delight. "I say, does anybody know you're here?"

"Lady Marshbaldon did really ask me," said Reggie plaintively.

"She's kept it jolly dark," the Duke chuckled. "What's doing?"

"Nothing," said Reggie. He was bored and ruffled. "My shop's closed."

The Duke winked. "Oh absolutely. But you never know, you know, what?"

"Yes, I think so. People very seldom ask me to come to a murder. Only to meet the corpse."

"Jolly," said the Duke, a little chastened. "I wasn't thinking of corpses, old chap."

"Were you thinking?" Reggie groaned.

"Quite a bit," the Duke's twinkling eyes challenged him. "I was thinking of the last merry old week-end I had. Old Beaver's place. Just like this. We had a burglary. I suppose the chappies mark down these shows, what?"

"Do they?"

"Well, I mean to say, this sort of show is a jewel parade. Did you see the Catalani and Dolly Rootham? I bet they've brought all their loot. Different set each night. The jolly old cat burglar gets to know there's a party. Any country house is a sitter for a crack. That johnny last week got away with Lady Gilrea's emeralds. Haven't got him yet, have you?"

"Not in my department," said Reggie wearily.

"I've been on the staff myself," the Duke grinned.

But Reggie was then delivered from him. Lord Marshbaldon arose in his insignificance and took them off to the ladies. Reggie sought shelter by the French general's wife. She was not likely to know anything about him. She did not. She was peaceful and comforting.

He needed it. He wanted to banish the horrid suspicion that Lady Marshbaldon had asked him because she wanted to have a policeman on the premises. It was of course absurd. As a protection against burglars he would be less use than that infant Gwent. An Airedale would be more to the purpose. To his surprise he discovered that he was annoyed.

This is a condition which he does not permit himself. Chattering fluently to Madame la Générale, he sought in his mind for reasons and discovered that he was puzzled. Why was Gwent so mighty interested in last week's burglary? That Gilrea's wife should lose her jewels would not grieve him, to judge by the way he looked at Gilrea. Was there anything queer about the burglary? He remembered Superintendent Bell telling him that it was neat work and they were looking after two old hands. Gwent was an ass. But it was not only Gwent who took an interest in him. Why was Hilda Merton frightened of Mr. Fortune? Why did she warn that lad about him? Who the deuce was Hilda Merton? Gwent said the party last week was the same sort of show. The same people then? Was Hilda there too—when the Gilrea emeralds were stolen?

Gilrea knew who she was, at any rate. There he was where she lounged on a divan, talking to her, hanging over her. He knew all about her too.

That was a nasty smirk on his monkey face. And she knew all she wanted about Lord Gilrea. She had said something that took the smirk out of him. She stood up suddenly and sauntered out, a pleasant sight, every line in her graceful body declaring that she cared for nobody, no, not she.

Reggie felt a simple manly desire to go after her and indulged it. She had gone out to the terrace. He stood a moment in the light from the dining-room and turned to the cool fragrant dark. She was invisible.

"Hallo!" her voice said.

"Thank you." He came towards it.

"Why?"

"Because I'm not a cat."

"Sure?"

"Well, I can't see in the dark."

"Want to see me?"

The white glimmer of her arms was close to him. She stood leaning her elbows on the stone balustrade, looking out into the night. "I was feeling lonely," said Mr. Fortune.

"I wasn't."

"I now apologize and die."

"Good luck."

Mr. Fortune felt that he was not really wanted. He removed himself. The next minute he saw a reason why she had no use for him. Another man was coming down the terrace. But there was no sentiment in their meeting.

"Babe, you silly owl," said he.

"Oh, lie down," said she.

"Come on. Our number's up."

"They can jolly well take it down."

"What's wrong, old girl?"

"Fed."

"Oh rot. We'll have to give 'em a dance. Can't dodge it."

"Look here, Jimmy——" She took his arm and marched him off. Not into the drawing-room.

Reggie walked the other way with emphatic feet and lit a cigar. Merton—dancing: there was in some stratum of his memory a connection. "The two Mertons, the best dancers in London," some silly fool said that some time. A pair of professional amateurs doing the round of the big houses. Yes, that placed Hilda Merton. But what was the matter with her? He wandered back to the light from the drawing-room She was not inside.

The cigar was finished before she appeared. She and her brother came into the room from the other end. Lady Marshbaldon started up and began to scold her facetiously. Too naughty to run away and hide, really a bad, bad girl, everybody just dying to see that dinky new dance; and so forth. Hilda was languid and haughty. She sank down on the divan while her brother arranged the room and conferred with Lady Rootham who was going to play for them. The music began. Her brother

approached her in the manner of a shy youth to the disdainful lady of his affections. She stood up and went off with him in slow time as if he did not exist.

And Mr. Fortune was bored. The dance was nothing, a dance of musical comedy, half luscious, half gymnastic, they went through it with the precision and vigour of athletes, the girl's shapely body was conscientiously displayed. When he was quite sure she was not going to do it again, Mr. Fortune came in.

Then for the first time he had speech with Lady Marshbaldon as she turned from gushing over Hilda. "Charming, wasn't it, Mr. Fortune? Perfectly charming."

Lord Gilrea, who was also grinning down at Hilda, looked round quickly and stared at Reggie's solemn round face. "What's that? I beg pardon?" he said.

"I was just saying to Mr. Fortune—oh don't you know Mr. Fortune? Really now! Lord Gilrea, Mr. Fortune."

Reggie bowed. "Mr. Fortune?" Gilrea repeated. "Please to meet you." He did not look it. "I've heard of you, haven't I?"

"Of course you have," Lady Marshbaldon laughed. "It's the Mr. Fortune." She made a face and a stage whisper. "Scotland Yard."

Gilrea laughed too. "I know. That's right.

Always keep in with the police, Lady M. You never know when you'll want a friend."

Lady Marshbaldon told him he was a bad fellow and he must be quiet now and sit down. Madame Catalani was going to sing.

Reggie looked round for a seat, found the divan which Hilda had been using empty and took it. Nobody came to sit with him. Gilrea indeed seemed anxious to be as far away as possible. "Is he trying to get out?" Mr. Fortune communed with himself. "Or does he want to find somebody? Why don't he love me? This is a queer crowd. Anyone who hears my name gets the jumps."

Gilrea and every one else subsided into silence. A man at the piano began to play Rossini. Madame Catalani came forward, a middle-aged Italian housekeeper put into evening dress and plastered with diamonds. But out of her came a voice that was sunshine and joy and it was an artist who played with it.

Reggie leaned back and shut his eyes. He came out of fairyland to hear silly people making a noise and calling on her to sing again. There was something hard in the cushions. He felt underneath him and his hand closed on a key. A big key, the key of some room. "Do you lock up your bedroom when you stay in this house?" Mr. Fortune asked himself. "A certain lack of confidence in Lady Marshbaldon's guests. This is a very queer crowd."

Madame Catalani would sing again. One song and one song only. She was as sharp about it as a bargaining housewife. The next minute she was Mimi of "La Bohême" and (if a man shut his eyes) a sweet and dear delight. Then the chattering world came back. No, she would not sing again, her teeth seemed to clash as she said it. She would like a glass of hot lemonade before she went to bed.

Reggie opened his eyes. Lady Marshbaldon had begun setting people down to bridge. It is among his dearest convictions that he has no head for cards and all who have ever played with him will eagerly agree, but there was no one in that party who had and Lady Marshbaldon is a great organizer. He found himself set down to a table with the admiral and Lady Rootham and the *divorcée* of the moment. Everybody was set down, though Gilrea made an ingenious effort to escape to the outer room, to the society of Madame Catalani, grimly determined on lemonade, and Lady Vera, whose complexion was known always to demand its beauty sleep. They only defied Lady Marshbaldon.

The game had gone some way. The admiral, his face a little congested, was lying back in his chair to stare at Reggie, when a shriek of high power rent their ears.

"Whatever is that?" said Lady Marshbaldon. "Do ring, Lord Gilrea. Oh no, the servants will all be in bed."

The men tumbled out of the room and ran upstairs in a crowd. In the corridor above Madame Catalani flung wide her arms and appealed to many saints. Lady Vera came out of her bedroom and ran to her.

Reggie and Gwent reached her first and she cast herself upon them. "I say, what's up, Fortune?" said Gwent, sustaining her, for her remarks were in Italian and French.

"She's lost her jewels," said Reggie. "Her jewel-case has been taken."

"Her jewel-case!" Lady Vera gasped and fell back against the wall. Other women scurried to their several rooms.

Gwent abandoned the Catalani to encircle Lady Vera's more grateful form. "Hallo, V.; what's up?"

"Which is your room, madame?" Reggie asked. She pointed dramatically at an open door and again stated fervently that her jewels were gone. Reggie went into the room and coming out again met Gilrea.

"Well, Mr. Fortune, what about it?" the little man said eagerly.

"The window is fastened," Reggie mumbled. "Not that it matters."

"Don't it though!" Gilrea laughed. "Means the fellow didn't get away by the window, eh?"

"Oh, do you think so?" Reggie murmured.

Lady Vera gazed at him with very big eyes in a white face.

"If the window's shut, he came out by the door," Gilrea argued, "into the corridor—here!"

"I say, the johnny might be here now," Gwent cried, and relaxed his tender hold on Lady Vera. "Hunt the other rooms, what?" But relieved women hurried back to report all safe.

"Has anyone been upstairs since dinner?" Reggie asked.

Lady Vera, still gazing at him, nodded. "Yes, I have." Her voice was faint. "I saw a man. I thought he came from Madame Catalani's room. He went in there," she pointed to another door. "I thought he was carrying something."

"Miserable!" the Catalani pounced on her and shook her.

"I say, I say, I say," Gwent parted them.

Lady Vera shrank away to the next nearest man, Mr. Fortune. "I didn't know," she said plaintively. "I didn't think it was anything," She held on by his arm and put her head back and looked up at him with the puzzled appealing eyes of a child.

"Of course not," Gilrea bustled forward, "that room, eh, Lady V. Whose is it?"

"It's my sister's, if you want to know," Jimmy Merton faced him.

"Well, I guess Hilda won't mind," Gilrea chuckled

and turned the handle. "Locked, Jimmy. You might ask Hilda if she's got the key."

"How the devil could she have the key?" Merton cried.

Gwent came between them. "While you're babbling the johnny's off and away," he said and flung his solid bulk at the door. It held fast. "Some lock."

"I wonder," Mr. Fortune murmured. "One moment." He used the key he had found on the divan. The door opened. He slipped the key in his pocket, switched on the light and went in. The room was empty. Gwent dashed past him and made sure of that, thrusting a fist into the wardrobe and the curtains. "Chappie gone by the window, Fortune, what? It's open." He leaned out. "Not more than an easy drop."

"I wonder," said Mr. Fortune. He was contemplating something on the couch at the foot of the bed, a large jewel case of green morocco.

"Well, I'm damned," said Gilrea at his elbow.

"You think so?" said Mr. Fortune. "Well, well."

The rest of them were crowding into the room. "Here, madame, is this yours?" Gilrea called.

Madame Catalani thrust them all aside. Madame Catalani gave a scream and flung herself at it. But she was caught by Reggie. "Don't touch it, please," he said. "I want to go over it for finger-prints."

"Finger-prints, what is zat?"

"The prints of the fingers of the person who stole it," said Reggie carefully.

"But my jewels, are zey taken, are zey zere?"

Reggie tried the lid delicately. "The case is locked, madame."

"I go to get my keys." She rushed out.

"Yes. Do you mind going downstairs?" he said to Gilrea at his elbow. "Do you all mind going downstairs? I want to have a look at this room."

"What ho!" said Gwent. "The police have several clues," and he led the way out.

As soon as they were gone Reggie fell on his hands and knees. He did not bother to shut the door. While the talk and the footsteps receded he could hear Lady Vera telling once again how she saw a man go into the room and didn't think anything of it. He continued to crawl. They were all on the stairs except Lady Vera and Gilrea. She was still telling him all about it. Reggie crawled out into the corridor. Lady Vera became aware of him and gave a suppressed hysterical scream and caught at Gilrea's hand. Reggie looked up in mild apologetic surprise. "All right," Gilrea said impatiently. "Come along, come along." He hurried her after the others.

Reggie made another crawling tour of the room, stood up, stood by the window, looked at the frame

and the sill and turned away to contemplate the jewel-case with a slow benign smile. Then he put his handkerchief through the handle and thus carrying the case went out and locked the door behind him. He wandered down the corridor to the end, examining the floor and sighed and turned back, and slowly, still looking at every corner with curious eyes, came downstairs.

In the drawing-room was a din of many voices. Madame Catalani proclaimed her wrongs in a jargon of several languages and Lady Marshbaldon told her how splendid it was they had Mr. Fortune there and neither understood nor listened to the other. Gwent expounded the manners and customs of cat burglars amidst exclamations of horror. Gilrea was critical. A pity Gwent hadn't gone into the police. He might have helped them last week. A cat burglar every week-end was too much of a good thing. Did Gwent happen to be sure the burglar was a cat?

Reggie listened to this for some minutes. The strident tones of Gilrea seemed to be gaining. Reggie went into the room.

Madame Catalani rushed at the jewel-case brandishing keys. Reggie's hand went up. "Yes. One moment. One moment. Has anybody else lost anything?"

"Nobody, Mr. Fortune, nobody," Lady Marshbaldon cried to a chorus of happy sighs.

"All quite sure?" Gilrea said sharply, glancing round. "You didn't let Hilda into her room, Fortune."

"Oh, I'm so sorry," Reggie looked at the girl.

"I haven't got anything to lose," she said fiercely.

"Why do you torture me?" Madame Catalani cried in Italian. "Let me, let me." Reggie took the keys from her shaking hands and opened the jewel-case. It was empty.

Madame gazed at him, cried to her patron saint and flung herself upon the floor and wept.

Lady Marshbaldon said in tones of ecstasy, "But how frightful! How terrible! What a perfectly awful thing!" and knelt beside the writhing victim and embraced her. "You poor, poor dear. Was there really much?"

Madame raised herself in the manner of a stricken heroine singing a death song and poured forth a catalogue.

"How awful!" said Lady Marshbaldon, enjoying herself heartily.

Madame la Générale shrugged her shoulders. "It is enough, in fact. But your diamond collar, you have it on, my friend."

The Catalani clasped her bosom and was a little comforted. "But the others!" she groaned and wept for them again.

"What about the jolly old police, Fortune?" Gwent broke in.

"Yes. I dare say we shall want a jewel expert in the end," said Mr. Fortune slowly and closed the case. "What are we going to tell him?"

"Your show, what?" Gwent chuckled.

"Lady Vera saw a man coming from madame's room who went into Hilda's carrying something," said Gilrea.

She started, looked at him with frightened eyes, gulped and nodded.

"When was that?" Reggie asked.

"Oh early, much earlier. You remember, dear," —she turned to Lady Rootham—"when I went up to get those snapshots."

"Oh yes. When we were waiting for Hilda to dance. Jimmy had just gone to find her."

There was a moment of silence.

"I know," said Gilrea. "Jimmy went out to look for Hilda. Well, Lady V., what was the man like?"

"I went into the garden," cried Jimmy Merton.

"I know you did, Jimmy," Gilrea nodded at him. "We all saw you. What was the man like, Lady V.?"

"I—I don't know," she said faintly.

"What!" He was startled. "You don't know?" He frowned at her. "Oh come now, let's have it."

"I—don't—know." She brought the words out with stubborn effort.

"You saw him cross the corridor from one room

to the other and you don't know what he was like!" Gilrea cried. She shook her head, her big eyes pleaded with him. "That's rather steep, isn't it? I suppose there was a man?"

She turned, hid her face in a cushion and cried.

"You're a merry old detective, ain't you, G.?" said Gwent, taking hold of the little man's shoulder so that he squirmed. "Ease up, my lad."

"There's no need for Lady Vera to cry. No need at all—that I know of," said Gilrea. "Sorry to distress her. But I'd rather like to get at the thief. I had a jewel robbery myself, you know. Rather on the same lines." He looked round the room. "It was pretty much the same party at Beaver's last week, wasn't it?"

"Not quite," said Reggie gently. "I wasn't there."

"It's a pity you weren't, Fortune. You're right in on this, eh? What about it? Last week my wife's emeralds were stolen. The police couldn't find a sign that anybody had broken into the house. To-night Madame Catalani's jewels have been taken. Did you see any trace of a burglar getting in?"

"I didn't look, you know," said Reggie.

"I dare say not! Madame Catalani's window was fastened. Whoever got into her room got in by the door."

"Is zat so?" Gwent chuckled.

"Lady Vera saw a man crossing the corridor

with the jewel-case in his hands. He went into Hilda's room. We found the room locked and the jewel-case inside—empty. Curious, isn't it? I wish Lady Vera had been upstairs in Beaver's house when my emeralds were stolen. I wonder who she'd have seen there? It was pretty much the same party."

"I was there, if that's what you mean," Hilda cried.

"We were there," her brother said. "What about it, Gilrea?"

"G., my lad, you're the limit," Gwent growled.

"Damme, sir," the admiral found his naval voice, "do you mean to say one of the company's a thief, a professional thief, damme?"

"Really, Lord Gilrea! How horrid you are!" Lady Marshbaldon fluttered with delight. "How perfectly awful!"

"What do you mean?" Jimmy Merton stood over the little man.

He shook his head. "It's a pity, Jimmy. Such a pity. I'm sorry. What do you think of the evidence, Fortune?"

"Curious features," Reggie mumbled. "Very curious features."

"They are, aren't they? I don't want to make a fuss, Jimmy, but you see how it's gone. What do you mean to do about it?"

"Do nothing."

"Think again," said Gilrea gently enough. "While you and your sister were out of the drawing-room a man's seen going into her room with the jewel-case. The empty case was found in her room. I don't want a fuss. Nobody wants a fuss. But Madame wants her jewels."

Madame started up. "Jimmy Merton! Ah, Hilda," she made a large, tragic gesture. "Miserable! It is you. Give me my jewels then. Give me zem, wretched. I do no more zen. I forgive you."

"That's the best way, Jimmy," said Gilrea quietly.

"Begad, madame, that's very handsome," the admiral cried. "Come on, sir. It's damned better luck than you deserve."

"Yes, indeed. How splendid of you, madame. Oh, Hilda, how dreadful of you. Do tell him to go and get them."

"It's a lie," Hilda cried. "I know nothing about her jewels." She looked at her brother anxiously.

Jimmy Merton stood flushed and scowling. "I never saw the jewel-case till Fortune found it," he said.

Madame Catalani flung up her hands and called upon her saint.

"I'm sorry," said Gilrea gravely. "If you will have the police, I suppose you must."

"But we've got 'em," Gwent cried. "Mr.

Fortune, forward. I say, you're being a bit coy, Fortune."

"Yes. I'm not official, you know. I'm only a friend of the family."

"How nice of you," Lady Marshbaldon beamed.

"You don't deal with this sort of thing, of course," Gilrea agreed. "Better telephone for the police, eh? The room will have to be searched, won't it?"

"Yes, yes. It is indicated," Mr. Fortune said slowly. "But we've no right, you know."

"Quite so. Well, better get on the telephone, Lady M. It's late enough already." Gilrea was brisk.

"Mr. Fortune can search my room if he likes," said Hilda, staring defiance at him.

Reggie shook his head, smiling. "Oh no, no. Not me. I'm under suspicion. I was the fellow who had a key to the room. I'll stay here. We'll all stay here while some blameless folks search. What about Gwent, Miss Merton?"

"I don't mind."

"I say, go easy," Gwent flushed. "Lady's job, what?"

Madame la Générale rose. "I will go with you. If mademoiselle permits."

"Thanks very much," said Hilda.

"Better search my things too, Gwent," said her brother.

"Right-o."

"One moment," said Mr. Fortune. "The key." Gwent took it, found it an ordinary bedroom key and stared at him. "Yes. Quite so," Mr. Fortune smiled and opened the door for Madame la Générale. "And that's that," he murmured as he sat down again.

They were a constrained company. Even Lady Marshbaldon could not talk. Mr. Fortune turned his chair to one of the abandoned bridge tables and took up the cards and began to build a house with them.

It was a house of many stories before the searchers came back.

"Nothing. Nothing at all," said Madame la Générale, a little flushed. She swept across the room to Hilda. "I was not surprised, mademoiselle, I," she said, and sat down beside her.

"Not a sparkle," Gwent confirmed her. "Absolutely not."

Madame Catalani lifted up her voice and wailed. But it was Gilrea who was most surprised. He glared at Gwent, he glared at Madame la Générale, he looked for somebody else to glare at and found Lady Vera.

The card house fell with a flutter. Mr. Fortune rose. "Yes. You'll want a new theory, won't you?" he said.

Gilrea took no notice. He stared at Lady Vera

and was not beautiful. "You were up there alone," he said stridently. "Who was it went into that room?"

Lady Vera gazed at him with childlike wonder and fear in her big blue eyes. "It was a man," she breathed.

"That's all right, what?" Gwent cried. "Johnny pops in there with the jewel-case, locks the door, stuffs the swag in his pockets and skips by the window. What about it, Fortune?"

"And locked the empty case before he went?" said Reggie. "You think so?"

"Well, hang it, whoever pinched the jewels did lock the case."

"Yes, yes. That's what I'm pointin' out," said Reggie patiently. "But it's most unprofessional."

"What do you mean?" Gilrea cried.

"I mean it's not like a man in the regular trade. It suggests the amateur, the hasty, rattled amateur. Don't you feel that, Gilrea?"

"Good God, man, I don't know the tricks of the trade," Gilrea said with contempt.

"No, no. But it's a very curious crime. Generous use of keys. The locked case. And the locked door."

"Well, hang it, a fellow wouldn't want anybody coming while he was pouching the swag," Gilrea protested. "He just locked the door and skipped out of window with the key in his pocket."

"Do you think so? I found the key of the door down here."

Gwent frowned. Gwent gave a long whistle.

"Oh you did, did you?" Gilrea cried. "You might have said so before. Whereabouts did you find it?"

"On the divan. Some time before the alarm."

"On the divan?" Gilrea laughed. "Where Hilda was sitting all the evening."

"How clever of you to remember," Reggie murmured.

Hilda started up to face Gilrea. "Yes, where I was sitting when you came and insulted me."

"Oh, I insulted you! You've thought of that rather late," he snarled.

"What mademoiselle says, **it is true.**" Madame la Générale came to her side.

"He's made a dead set at me everywhere since I turned him down," said Hilda.

"That's the story now, is it?" Gilrea sneered. "You're a bit above yourself, my dear. That won't cut much ice. Well, Fortune, have you got enough? I'm off to bed."

"Oh, don't go." Mr. Fortune stood in the way. "I want the other key."

Gilrea drew back "What do you mean, the other key?"

"The key of the jewel-case," said Mr. Fortune.

"Madame's got that, you fool. You saw her open the thing."

"Yes. When it was empty. I want the key that opened it when it was full. I want the key in your waistcoat pocket."

"I've got no key. Only my own." He pulled out a bunch at the end of a chain. "Here you are."

"The waistcoat pocket," said Mr. Fortune mildly.

Gilrea told him to go to the devil.

Gwent embraced the little man with one large arm and thrust fingers into his middle and produced a small bright key.

Mr. Fortune took it and tried it in the jewel-case. The lock turned and turned again. "And the jewels, Lord Gilrea?" he said blandly.

"I don't know anything about the jewels," Gilrea cried.

"My innocent che-ild!" said Gwent. "I'll have a look round your maiden chamber." He turned with his hand on the door. "Any friend of the Baron Gilrea's like to come and see fair?"

"I'll go with you, begad," the admiral cried and off they went.

"Lord Gilrea likes to have rooms searched," said Madame la Générale sweetly.

Gilrea had no ears for her. He was occupied with Mr. Fortune. "You're doing well, aren't you?" His brows contracted about his little eyes. "That was an assault."

"Yes. Quite. You'd better take Gwent into court. Plenty of witnesses."

"You put him up to it. You've sent him up to break into my room."

"Oh no, no. Not me," Reggie protested. "Natural curiosity."

"You've put up a pretty game. Who do you think you're playing for? Why don't you tell the truth? How did you know that key was in my pocket?"

"Yes. That's very interesting. Do let's have the truth. How did you come to have a key that opens Madame Catalani's jewel-case? It shows great enterprise."

"I know nothing about the cursed key. Lady Vera asked me to keep it for her. She hadn't a pocket or something. If you knew I had it, you must have seen her give it me."

"Yes, yes. It seems likely," Reggie smiled. "Any questions, Lady Vera?"

"A key?" she said. She looked more puzzled and frightened than ever. "Oh yes. I gave him a key. It was upstairs outside Hilda's room. I picked it up from the floor. I was just looking at it when he took it. But I didn't say anything, only 'Look,' or something. He took it and I thought it was his, of course. Did you see me, Mr. Fortune? You do see everything!"

Gilrea laughed. "Well, Fortune, satisfied now?"

"No. Not satisfied. Only interested."

"She found it outside Hilda's room."

"You're so discreet, you know. You've been carryin' on all the evening with a jewel-case key that was found outside Miss Merton's room in your pocket and never said a word. You're too discreet."

"I didn't want to make trouble for anyone."

Madame la Générale laughed. "Ah, we didn't understand," said Mr. Fortune sadly. "You ought to have explained. We don't really know you."

The door flew open. "The treasure hunters now return," Gwent announced in a roar. "With the complete boodle. First picture, the Baron Gilrea's dressing-case closed. Second picture, the Baron Gilrea's dressing-case open." He flung open the lid. A glittering confusion was revealed. "G., you measly little worm!"

Gilrea gulped. "It's a damned plant," he said. "It's a plant." He craned his neck to look.

Mr. Fortune held up a diamond tiara. Madame Catalani surged forward and fell upon the jewels, making a joyful noise. "Are they all there, madame?"

"Yes, all," she gasped between thanking her saint. "But zis—zis is not mine," she held out a large dark necklace.

Mr. Fortune took it and poured it over his hands in green flames. "Is this the famous Gilrea emeralds by any chance?" he inquired.

"That's mine," Gilrea snatched it. "Now I know," and he turned on Lady Vera. "You're a

tricky wench. You've given yourself away at last. Now, Fortune, we'll get to business. The night the emeralds were stolen in Beaver's place I met Lady Vera coming out of my wife's room."

"Oh!" Lady Vera gasped and hid her face and wept.

"When we found the necklace was gone, I asked her what she'd been up to. I couldn't prove anything, do you see, but I let her know I had my suspicions. She was properly scared. I told her if I didn't see the emeralds soon there'd be bad trouble. This is her way of getting back on me."

"Yes. Lady Vera's turn," said Mr. Fortune.

"Me?" She unveiled a pale face and glistening eyes. "But I don't understand. It didn't happen, any of it. I never met him. I never talked to him. I don't know anything about it. What is the matter with him, Mr. Fortune? First he says it was Hilda, now he says it was me—and all the time it was him."

"Lord Gilrea is a little obscure," Mr. Fortune admitted. "Did you claim insurance on your emeralds, Lord Gilrea?"

Gilrea hesitated, frowning. "Of course I did."

"Yes. And of course you told the insurance people you thought Lady Vera had them?"

"How could I? I didn't want to make a scandal."

Mr. Fortune contemplated him benignly. "Well, well," he said.

"That," said Gwent, "is the limit."

But it was Jimmy Merton who dealt with Lord Gilrea. "You didn't want to make a scandal?" He thrust forward. "You wanted to make us out thieves while you got off with the stuff yourself." The first Baron Gilrea went backwards over a chair and sat on the floor holding one eye and spitting. "Get up, you cur," said Jimmy Merton.

"No, I don't think so," Mr. Fortune intervened. "He won't, you know."

"He's got his," said Gwent with satisfaction.

"How perfectly dreadful!" Lady Marshbaldon gurgled. "It really has been too frightful."

They went to bed and left Lord Gilrea alone with his emeralds and his black eye and his thoughts. When the lion party began to come downstairs in the morning he was gone.

Mr. Fortune was not among the first. Mr. Fortune, having watched from his bedroom window the main body go off to the golf course in the park, decided that it might be safe to go into the garden. He was wrong. Among the hardy perennials all was well. When he came round the hedge to the lily pond he found Lady Vera being decisively kissed by Gwent.

None of them could pretend they hadn't noticed it.

Lady Vera emerged, smiling, in beautiful order, cool—a remarkable achievement. Being kissed by the Duke of Gwent must resemble being kissed by

a hearty, if clean-shaven, bear. "Congratulate me, Mr. Fortune," she said.

"Me," said Gwent.

"Yes, I should like to," said Mr. Fortune gravely. "The fact is, I was looking for Lady Vera myself."

"How sweet of you," Lady Vera smiled.

"Too late, old friend," Gwent grinned.

"Go away, Billy," she said. "Mr. Fortune doesn't want you." She put her pretty bare arm through Reggie's and he led her to a stone seat in the hedge.

"No. I didn't want Gwent," he said gravely. "I wanted to show you these." He took out of his pocket-book and laid upon it two shell-pink rose petals.

"Pretty," she touched them. "Where did you find them, Mr. Fortune?"

"In Miss Merton's room last night. No one but you was wearing Killarney roses last night."

"Are they Killarney?" she said. "Nice name." She looked up at him with a wondering childlike stare. "You mean I had been in Hilda's room?"

"That's what I had to say to you."

"Billy!" she called and Gwent arrived. "Mr. Fortune had found out I went to Hilda's room. Isn't he clever? And he didn't say a word last night. Isn't he a lamb?"

"You're a sportsman, Fortune," said Gwent

heartily. "I say, V., you fell on your feet, old girl, having Fortune here."

"Mr. Fortune's been perfectly sweet," Lady Vera murmured and considered him, as a child measures an adult, "but I do believe I could have managed." She put her hand on his. "You frightened me dreadfully now and then. But you didn't mean it, did you? You didn't really know," she smiled forgiveness. "You see, I had always had his horrid emeralds. That's what began it. At Mrs. Beaver's I just went into his wife's room to speak to her and she wasn't there and the emeralds were lying on the table and they really are rather priceless and—well, you see, I just took them. That nasty little man saw me. He was perfectly horrid. I didn't know, he didn't say anything, he didn't stop me, he just went downstairs and told everybody his wife's emeralds had been stolen and telephoned for the police. Then he caught me in my room. He frightened me horribly, Mr. Fortune. He said he was going to tell the police and everybody would know and I should be tried for stealing. I simply had to beg him to let me off. Horrid little man."

"I wish I'd handled him," said Gwent sadly. "Jimmy meant well, but he hasn't got a punch."

"Well, then, you see," Lady Vera became less plaintive, "he thought he could make me do just

anything he wanted. And what he really wanted was to ruin the Mertons because Hilda wouldn't look at him, poor child. So he said he'd let me off if I would put it on them. At first I thought he was mad. That sort of man does go quite crazy you know, when he can't get a woman. But he had a plan all ready. Most of us were going to be at Lady Marshbaldon's. I was to take the Catalani's jewels, she had the best, and put them in one of the Merton's rooms with the emeralds and just say I saw Jimmy with the case."

"The key?" Reggie murmured. "The key that opened the jewel-case?"

For the first and last time Lady Vera flushed. "It was horrid. He made me borrow the Catalani's keys last week. I had to pretend I'd lost mine. I had them all the morning—he had them. And he got that key made. But of course, Mr. Fortune, I never meant to do it, never. I was quite wretched about it for days. Then I saw how it would all work out quite nicely. And it did, didn't it? But I was so glad when I found you were there. You"—she looked at him with her head on one side—"you're so comfortable."

"Am I?" said Reggie sadly. "You'd quite settled to put them in Gilrea's room before you knew I should be looking on."

"Oh yes, of course. But you were such a help. So clever of you to see me giving Gilrea the key.

I was rather anxious about that. But you managed beautifully, Mr. Fortune."

"Thanks so much. Yes. I always thought you meant me to use that key. It's the other one that puzzles me. The one you put on the divan. Miss Merton's key. Why use Miss Merton's room at all? Just as easy to go straight to Gilrea's."

"Oh, Mr. Fortune!" She was surprised at his dullness; she was pained. "Don't you see? I wanted that nasty man to be shown up trying to ruin poor Hilda. And he was, wasn't he?" She gurgled laughter. "Everybody will be talking about it. Little Gilrea stealing jewels and hiding the case in Hilda's room. Little Gilrea sitting on the floor after Jimmy hit him. It will be splendid for the Mertons. They'll be the rage."

"And the Baron Gilrea is down and out," Gwent chuckled.

"Yes, yes. It's very beneficent all round."

Gwent put a vast arm about Lady Vera's shoulders. "I say, Fortune, she is a sportsman, isn't she?"

"All my congratulations," said Reggie and contemplated Lady Vera with scientific interest. But her wide childlike eyes were devoted to Gwent.

Reggie withdrew hastily. There is something seismic about the caresses of the Duke of Gwent. Reggie felt tired.

THE VIOLET FARM

IN the consulting-room of Mr. Fortune stands an ancient oak chest on which by the curious may be read the inscription: Y AI IOX IO IO EPIKALL H. This is the explanation of it.

The Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department complained of the world. It was after dinner. It was in fact after one of Mr. Fortune's dinners, the exquisite beauty of which is apt to make men think of the faults in common life. A pensive murmur rose to something sharp. "Do you know my aunt, Reginald?" said Lomas.

Mr. Fortune opened his eyes. "This is so sudden. I thought you were just moaning at large. No. I do not know your aunt. Not as such. But tell me the worst. I feel for you. I have lots of relations myself."

"You know what aunts are?"

"Yes, by letter. They're the only people now alive who write letters. Lots of letters."

"She does," said Lomas with emotion.

"Well, you should answer sometimes. Not often. Every Christmas or so."

"Oh, I've answered her early and often. Now she's coming up to town to see me."

Mr. Fortune sat up. "Lomas!" he said severely. "What have you been doing? What has alarmed aunt? Have you been moving towards matrimony?"

"I wish I had," said Lomas bitterly.

"Oh, my dear fellow! As bad as that?"

"There are times when a wife would be useful."

"Is it possible?"

"One could turn her on to one's female relations."

"What a murderous plan! Tell me all, Lomas."

"My aunt's Lady Sancreed, pillar of the Eow Church, you know, lived all her life in the country. She has a ward, parson's daughter, who ran a bit wild, went to Rome and studied painting—that sort of thing. This chit, Vera Daymer, picked up with another minx, Isabel Villaret, in the same line. They came back to England and set up a studio in Chelsea. I went to look at their pictures, the usual stuff, latest fashion—fair work—not worth doing. The first odd thing is they chucked it all up and retired to the backwoods. Well, I don't expect Vera to have a reason for anything she does. She's quite an advanced young woman. But the simple life in the country is not her sort of craze. She's urban, highly urban. She told me they'd found out they would never be more than third class in painting so they decided to wash it out and do something real. And that isn't like her either.

It's almost common sense. Well, they went. They went right off the map. Place called Cele in Staneshire. They bought a prehistoric cottage and started a violet farm."

"A what?" said Mr. Fortune.

"Yes, it sounds crazy, doesn't it? A violet farm, Reginald. Growing violets for the London market. It is done, you know."

"Of course it's done. Charmin' trade. But you wouldn't go to Staneshire to grow violets."

"Then it's just where Vera would go. There they are, two high-browed Bohemians growing violets where violets won't grow, living alone in an ancient solitary cottage—if they are alone. That's one of Lady Sancreed's troubles."

"Aunts will be aunts."

"Oh yes, quite. If Vera can look after herself racketing round Europe, she ought to be all right in a country cottage. I mentioned that. But my aunt says they're getting a horrid name in the county. She's been writing to the local archdeacon and the good man's quite shocked at them."

"I never shocked an archdeacon myself," said Mr. Fortune dreamily. "But I should think it was quite easy."

"Yes, that's what he's for. You can cut out the archdeacon. You can cut out everything separately. But taken altogether it's a queer business. There's Vera. She's been writing that

the people are horrid—not the county people, she don't bother about society, she's far too highbrow, but the villagers. They won't do anything for her, they make things as difficult as they can and so on. She's put their backs up, I suppose. She would. You can cut that out too. Vera and Isabel doing the intellectual Bohemian would annoy any decent village. But that's not the end of it. I've had an official inquiry from the Staneshire chief constable. Is anything known about Vera Daymer and Isabel Villaret."

Mr. Fortune put out the end of his cigar with great care. "Well, well, well," he murmured. "And did you refer him to aunt?"

"I told him who they were and asked what he meant by it. He was very civil. Said it was perfectly satisfactory and regretted troubling me. There had been some rumours in the district as the ladies were strangers. You know what the country is."

"Yes, I think so," said Mr. Fortune dreamily. "And what is aunt's idea?"

"Aunt's idea is that something has to be done about it. I ought to stop this persecution of poor Vera instantly and I ought to get the dreadful girl away from this horrible cottage at once and show her the error of her ways. Aunt must really come and see me and settle something immediately. That's where the canker gnaws."

"My poor Lomas!" Mr. Fortune held out his hand.

"Yes. Why are aunts?" said Lomas sadly. "But it is a crazy business, isn't it?"

"I wonder," Mr. Fortune murmured. He poured himself a glass of Vichy water and tasted it critically. "There are points. I should like to meet Vera."

"Good gad!" Lomas was much affected. "This is true friendship."

"No, no. Only curiosity. But I think I'll go and have a look at the violet farmers."

Lomas stared at him. "You're a noble fellow, Reginald. My aunt would love you."

"I wonder."

"But you frighten me. Have you got something in your wonderful head?"

"No, no. The open mind. That's what the case wants. You're so prejudiced."

"The case!" Lomas gasped. "It isn't a case. It's clotted nonsense."

"That's why it's interesting," said Mr. Fortune.

On the next afternoon a large car drew up in the village of Cele, which consists of two farms and six cottages in brown stone and thatch and offers no other entertainment to large cars than a beer house and a post office. The chauffeur spoke to his master, got out, opened the car's bonnet and bent over his engine. He emerged with a worried and apologetic face to say that it would be a long

job, sir. Some women and children assembled to have a look at it. Out of the rugs in the car rose a pink face, round, sleepy, wrathful, which swore. The owner came heavily to ground. "What is this place, anyway?" he growled. The chauffeur passed the question on to the gazing women. "What? Cele? Cele? Never heard of it. Any inn?" The pink face looked at the beer house with disgust. "No, there wouldn't be. Just the sort of place you would break down. Get busy, damn your eyes." He lounged away.

The chauffeur winked at the women. "Bit of a lad, ain't he?" and began to talk.

Out of sight of the village of Cele, Mr. Fortune sat down with a map. He found thereon a lane beside a brook which became in practice a brook flowing down a lane. Thus he arrived damply at the mellow stone building which is Hill Barn and was then the property of Miss Vera Daymer. It stands alone on a ridge in rolling miles of pasture sheltered by an ancient oak and some younger brethren. It is in the shape of a barn, but has windows cut in it and chimneys built on to it. An old and broken hedge about it was then patched with flimsy fencing of wood and wire. Mr. Fortune, contemplating it with a frown, became aware that somebody was contemplating him: a brown face in a frame of whiskers. "Good day," said Mr. Fortune. The man in whiskers grunted and spat and vanished

behind the hedge and was heard digging. "I say, could you tell me where I am?" said Mr. Fortune.

The whiskers again came into sight: dull eyes stared. "Where be going to?" said a slow voice.

"Well, I don't quite know. What is this place?"

"What's brought 'e to here?"

"William! Whoever are you talking to?" a girl cried.

"Dunno who 'e be," said William and again vanished and dug.

To the gate which was a hurdle came what looked like a boy. Its hair was cut short, it wore a tennis shirt and plus fours, its shape was boyish, but it spoke in a girl's voice: "Good Lord, what do you want?"

Mr. Fortune lifted his hat. "I'm so sorry to trouble you, but I'm lost."

"You must be to get here. What did you do it for?"

Mr. Fortune gazed at her. "But I didn't do it," he protested. "My car broke down in some deserted village and my fool of a man said it would be a two hours' job and there was only a pot-house, so I came for a walk and there doesn't seem to be a way to anywhere."

"There isn't."

"Thanks very much." He sighed heavily.

The girl was affected. His round face is absurdly childish. "Well, I dare say it will run to a cup of tea," she said.

"Oh no, really," said Mr. Fortune. "But it would probably save my life."

She opened the gate. "Come on then. You mustn't die here. Our reputation wouldn't stand it."

"Jolly old place to live in," said Mr. Fortune.

"Jolly old ruin. Bell!" she called. "Bell! Where the devil are you?"

The man in whiskers, who had been watching them with a dull cow-like stare, spat and resumed digging.

"Bell!" the girl called fiercely. "Bell, you pig!" There was no answer.

"Lovely garden," Mr. Fortune murmured, thinking that it was the worst garden he had ever seen.

The girl looked at him with suspicion. "We grow for the market," she snapped. "Bell! Bella!"

"Quite," Mr. Fortune murmured. It was indeed planned like a market garden with plants arranged in battalions, violets for the most part, carnations, chrysanthemums, but all puny and sickly, the garden of people who knew nothing about flowers.

What looked like a large boy scout came through the hedge. With relief Mr. Fortune discovered that it was not Isabel. It had a ruddy moustache. Its khaki shorts displayed very masculine legs. It was expansive and cheery. "Hullo, hullo, hullo," it said, "what's the excitement, V.? What ho! Who is the little gentleman?"

"Oh, don't be sprightly. When you've quite finished with Bell you might tell her I'm making tea."

"Snubs to me," he grinned. "My error, so sorry and what not," but she marched past him to the house. Mr. Fortune, following her timidly, saw the delinquent Isabel appear among the chrysanthemums. She also wore knickerbockers and shirt, but she had no resemblance to a boy. There was a murmured conversation.

"I say, Bella, we've been naughty."

"Oh help! But what's up now? Who's her young man?"

"Ask me another. Looks like a curate in disguise. He's come to tea."

"Golly!"

Mr. Fortune contracted a dislike for them. He hurried after Vera. The door opened into a large living-room which was full of chaos. It had several tables covered with a miscellany of eating apparatus, books, tools, papers, a fiddle, clothes, food in the raw. There were two oil-stoves with kettles. Pots and pans were kept in the vast and cold fireplace. An easel with drawing board stood by the window. More drawing things were on a high desk. Halting beside two pails of water, Mr. Fortune tried to see it all. What in the world was that thing in the corner under the shelf of chemists' bottles? A little printing press?

Vera, whirling about the room, tossed a rug over

it. "Where has that wretched girl put the matches? Oh, sit down, can't you? This place is a pigsty." She made chaos worse confounded. Mr. Fortune lit an oil-stove for her.

"But it's a noble old place," he said, looking up at the massive black beams which bore the high roof. "What was it?"

"Aha, what was it?" the large youth chuckled in the doorway. "Why, sir, the buzz is it was built by Noah on the model of the ark and never used since."

"Don't be an owl, Charles," said Isabel hastily. "Clear the table. Where's the bread, V.?" Vera raised a flushed face from the oil-stove and asked fiercely if she couldn't do something.

"Bread? Bread?" Charles inquired. "I don't mind telling you, sir, yesterday the bread was found in—well, well, mother wouldn't like it at all. It had been bread anyway. The trouble is you can't get bread canned, but we generally have milk, if they haven't lost the tin opener."

Mr. Fortune withdrew himself from the conversation. The spasmodic movements of Vera suggested an explosive temperature. He wandered into remote corners of the room. They had some rare old things among their rubbish. That chest might be fifteenth-century. There was something of an inscription on it. Much later work though. Queer lettering.

The girls were muttering together, not amiably. He was reminded of the rumbling of angry cats. When he turned they were both flushed and the large Charles, spread in a deck-chair staring at his big nailed boots, looked gloomily helpless.

It was in no way a pleasant tea. The fluid which he drank tasted of oil-stove. The bread was ancient and the butter remembered the tin from which it was digged. His hosts were even less agreeable. The exuberance of Charles was blighted. The two girls talked of the faults of the meal and the discomforts of their life, talked at each other acidly. Mr. Fortune was soon asking the way to Cele. As he fled he heard Vera grow shrill and something like weeping from Isabel.

When he came in sight of the village, his chauffeur Sam emerged from the post office hurriedly, wiping his mouth, trying not to look happy and succeeded completely on Mr. Fortune's announcement that he would now drive the dam' thing. They departed from the village of Cele like a projectile. "Get anything?" said Mr. Fortune.

Sam braced himself in his seat. "These village people are all right, sir. What you might call 'omely: very nice and 'omely. But they got a good old down on the young ladies. Fair 'ate 'em."

"Why?"

"I didn't get the 'ang of it at all. They're

calling 'em Bolsheviks. They believe it too. I don't know why. I couldn't 'ear of anything the young ladies 'ave done except a boy's 'ead what was killing a bird. I seen him. He could do with smacking. But the village people are nervy about it. Seems as if they was afraid. Sounds silly, sir, but that was the idea I got. They tell me as no one in Cele won't go near the young ladies' cottage now except the postman—and 'e 'as to. No one won't sell 'em anything, not milk nor nothing."

"Yes. I noticed that," Mr. Fortune sighed. "Anything occur to you, Sam?"

"No, sir, not clearly. Beg pardon, sir, you didn't ought to look at me driving like this. Ah!" The car swung in serpentine curves round cows and a horse rake.

"You've no imagination," said Mr. Fortune sadly.

Sam swallowed once and again.

But they arrived safe at Stanchester and there, Mr. Fortune announced, they would stay if a man could live in the inn. He consumed another tea and considered it possible. He engaged in a hot bath and meditation and emerged to telephone to Lomas.

"There's more in this than meets the eye. You'd better come down." A groan rattled in the telephone. It asked why. "Well, you might appeal to Vera's better nature. I didn't. I was quite

bad for her." The telephone, rather shrill, wanted to know what was the matter. "Ask me no more. The moon may draw the sea. But I couldn't. I couldn't draw any of 'em. Not even Charles. And he's resilient, is Charles." The telephone asked who the devil was Charles. "Ah, that's a very difficult part of the problem. Who is Charles and what's he for? Come along. I want you as a witness to character. Before the chief constable. Chief constables don't take to me."

"What have you been up to?" the telephone cried.

"Heaven knows. See you in the morning. Good-bye."

Morning brought the Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department in a petulant mood. It was not dispelled by Mr. Fortune's account of his investigations. "I'm much obliged to you, Reginald," he said bitterly, "I have a little work to do. And you dragged me down here to listen to this! Damme, you've got nothing at all."

"Oh, my Lomas! How can you? And after that tea I suffered for your dear sake! You're very unkind. Aunt wouldn't like it at all. How is aunt, by the way? Oh hush! Control yourself. You've got to call on the chief constable. I telephoned to him you were coming."

"The devil you did! What do you think I'm going to say to him?"

"I haven't the slightest idea," said Mr. Fortune sweetly.

But in the presence of the chief constable, a solid, square-cut man with the stamp of the navy on his manner and speech, Lomas became formally official. They had come down about the case which the chief constable referred to them. There were one or two small points . . .

"The young ladies at Cele?" Captain Camber said sharply. "I'm taking your word for them. Isn't that right, sir?"

"Well, of course, it's all in the family, captain," Mr. Fortune smiled. "Lomas's aunt, you know——"

"Quite, quite," Captain Camber hastily agreed.

"Thanks very much. We'll leave the family out, please," Lomas cried. "You asked who they were and I told you. You didn't say what you had against them."

"Because I hadn't anything like evidence. But there's some queer tales going about."

"Let's hear them, please."

"Very good. We had some forged notes passed here a month ago. We couldn't trace their origin —haven't traced it yet. What we did find was people saying that these strangers out at Cele were up to some queer game: brought a mysterious machine down with them, had chemist's stuff sent from London and so on. I suppose you don't wonder I wanted to know who they were."

Lomas laughed angrily. "No, I don't wonder at anything after that. Very imaginative people you've got down here, captain. What else has Miss Daymer been doing, please?"

Captain Camber shrugged. "Sorry you don't like it. You asked for it. I told you I was satisfied."

"Lomas apologizes," Mr. Fortune smiled. "Family indignation, you know, captain. Very natural and laudable but not relevant. Anything else being said against Miss Daymer?"

"If you put it to me, there is. Quite a lot." Captain Camber frowned at Lomas. "The country people don't like the way the young ladies carry on out there."

"I dare say. Miss Daymer's habits were learnt in the country."

"And that don't explain why she comes to live out in the country."

"Good gad, do you expect a young woman to be reasonable nowadays?"

"I don't expect anything of her. She's not my cousin. What they say is that she and her friends are Bolsheviks."

"My dear fellow! That's what everybody says of people they don't like nowadays."

"Yes. Yes." Mr. Fortune's quiet voice purred into this altercation. "But why don't they like her?"

"You'll pardon me," said Captain Camber with decision. "If you gentlemen came to ask me why Mr. Lomas's cousin isn't popular, I'm only saying you surprise me."

"You know, we're missing all the points, Lomas," Mr. Fortune said gently. "I wonder if Captain Camber could put his hand on anybody who started this forged note story."

"No idea, sir. Common gossip. That's all."

"Yes. But somebody thought of it first. Well now, what was this cottage of theirs before they took it?"

"Before? It's been a cottage time out of mind. Ramshackle old place. They bought it for a song from Lord Stanchester's trustees."

"Any competition from other buyers?"

"Good Lord, no," Captain Camber laughed. "It isn't much of a catch, sir."

"Did they turn anybody out?"

"Oh no. It's been empty for years."

Mr. Fortune sighed and stood up. "I'm afraid we've given you a lot of trouble, captain."

"I'm afraid you've drawn a lot of blanks, sir," Captain Camber smiled. "If I can be of any use," his tone declared certainly that he could not, "delighted, delighted, Mr. Lomas. But my idea is you'd better take Miss Daymer back to London."

"My dear fellow, I wish you knew her," said Lomas, and when they were outside condemned the eyes of Captain Camber.

"Quite. Quite," said Mr. Fortune. "Not one of our brighter minds. But there seem to be other people who agree with the captain."

"What do you mean?"

"I haven't decided. But the provisional hypothesis is that somebody here wants to get Miss Daymer out of her cottage."

"That's what you were working at, is it? You didn't make much of it. Why should any of these country people want to turn her out? She can't do them any harm. They don't want her cottage. The fellow said it had been derelict for years."

"I know. It's all very curious and disappointing. Why do they want to get rid of Vera? I think we'd better go and ask her."

It took much trouble; it took a good and long lunch to persuade Lomas to this desperate enterprise, but at last he was brought, strong and resolute, if slightly somnolent, to the big car. The lane which leads from the high road to Cele is narrow. The big car slowed, drew in to the bank and stopped to give way to a battered Ford which met it hooting furiously. Mr. Fortune raised himself in his seat. "My only aunt!" he groaned. The Ford rattled by and he stared after it.

"What's the matter with your aunt?" said Lomas sleepily.

"Wake up. That was Vera's friend Isabel and Isabel's friend Charles. With a policeman. He

had the air of one who pinches them. And will you tell me what that means?"

"Good gad!" said Lomas and became quite awake. "I should say it means that your provisional hypothesis is cancelled."

"I wonder." Mr. Fortune frowned.

"Yes. I wonder too. I wonder what they've done with Vera?"

"They?" Mr. Fortune stared at him with dull eyes.

"I mean these local police, of course."

"Oh, ah! I was thinking of Isabel and Charles. Who is Charles, anyway? What's his function?"

"Great heavens, how can I tell? Vera used to know half the detrimental highbrows in London. I always thought she'd get into an unholy mess with them some day. She's done it in style."

"My dear old thing!" said Mr. Fortune. "A little above normal, aren't you? A little jumpy. We don't know, you know." He stopped the car. They were on the verge of the village of Cele. It had a certain liveliness: it was being conversational. Half a dozen women and several men were gathered together. But the arrival of strangers produced a staring silence. Mr. Fortune with his most engaging manner wondered if anybody could tell him where Miss Daymer lived. A man slowly directed him and was nudged by a woman

and bidden tell the gentleman. "Why, what have you got to tell me?"

"You won't find her, sir, that's a fact. There's been murder done here."

"What, who's murdered?"

"She be. They ha' took her into Stanchester all bloody and dead."

"Why, who did it?"

"Ah, 'tis her own fine friends done it," a woman cried. "That's what comes of their carrying on. They be took away to jail, the pair of them."

"Her friends murdered her? You don't mean that?"

"There's them as saw it. Albert! Tell the gentleman." A lad was thrust forward, shuffling, proud of his importance, frightened. "Tell un what you saw."

"'Twere the other one with her sweetheart," said Albert. "They was cuddling by the old quarry and she come on them. She did let 'em have it proper, jealous like," he grinned. "The other one give her back as good. Then the man he ups and hits her a clout on the head and down her went into the quarry. So I run home."

"Ah, he's a wild one, him in the short pants. I see his eye," one of the women said. "I always told you, Martha Biggs."

"So you did surely. But I do reckon t'other wench is to blame for all. She's wanton."

They were scattered by the coming of another car. It pulled up short. Captain Camber sprang out and made for Lomas. "I tried to get you in Stanchester. You've heard, have you?"

"They tell me Miss Daymer has been murdered," Lomas said.

"I'm sorry," Captain Camber lowered his voice. "Well, she's not dead. The doctors won't promise anything. But she may pull through. We've had to arrest her friends. There's an eye-witness——"

"Yes, we've met him," said Mr. Fortune. "It's concussion, I suppose. Anything worse?"

"Broken a rib and an arm. She's unconscious. They hope it's only bad concussion. Will you go back and see her? I'm going up to the place where it happened."

"I'd better see the place," Mr. Fortune said. "Lomas, old man, I'll take that first. There's nothing for her yet but quiet."

"Thanks," Lomas nodded. "You're in charge."

"Albert Small," Captain Camber called in a naval voice. "I want you."

The quarry has long been out of action. It looks much like a natural sandstone cliff. Heather and bracken and gorse grow all around. "Now, my lad, where were you when you saw them?" said Captain Camber. Albert, something scared by these great people, pointed to the sandy bank and hedge which divided a turnip field from the

waste. "Humph. Rabbiting, eh?" said the captain and Albert grinned uncomfortably. Captain Camber marched to the hedge. "Yes, there's your snares. I thought so."

"They ain't mine, sir," Albert whined. "Take my dying oath, they ain't."

"Cut it out. You were down by the hedge here——"

"I was only picking a few berries."

"And what did you see?"

"I see them up there," Albert pointed up to the edge of the cliff. "Them two. Cuddling. I seen 'em at it before. Then the other one come along. She set about 'em. And the man he give her one on the head and down she goes. And I run away."

Captain Camber looked at Lomas. "That's pretty straight." And Lomas nodded. "We'd better go up there." Mr. Fortune had already gone. They arrived to find him frowning at some marks in the sand. "Nailed boots, eh? That young fellow was wearing nailed boots."

"Yes, I'm afraid so," Mr. Fortune murmured.

"Here's a woman's footprints quite close."

"Yes. Yes." Mr. Fortune glanced at him. "Where's our Albert? Oh, Albert: stand quite still. What were the two doing when you saw them first?"

"Cuddling," Albert grinned.

"Yes, as you were saying. But I mean, were they sitting down?"

Albert considered that. "Sort of setting. More like lying," he pronounced. "You know how 'tis."

"Just here?"

"Hereabouts."

"And you saw nobody else here?"

"Wasn't nobody to see."

"And when the lady was knocked over the edge what did you do?"

"I run home quick. For to get help like. I was afeared, I was."

"Yes, I see." Mr. Fortune turned to Captain Camber. "Now I think Albert can run home again."

"I think so. Run away, my lad. Don't get talking." Albert vanished and the captain approached Lomas with sympathy. "A bad business, sir. You see there's no help for it, we shall have to charge them. We'll go as slow as we can. When the young lady can tell her story, it may look different——"

"If she ever does tell it," Lomas shrugged. "Oh, you must go on with the case of course."

"You don't know the fellow who struck her?"

"Not from Adam. Fortune has seen him. Fortune!"

Mr. Fortune was a little way off. He was on his knees by a clump of gorse and brambles. He

was looking at some wet brown stains. He was smelling them. "Did you want me?" He rose. "Has Albert gone?" He made out the lad's retreating figure on the path below. "Oh yes. What did you make of our Albert?"

"He's got it all clear," said Captain Camber.

"Yes. Yes. Quite clear. I thought he was telling the truth in one place. Where he said he hadn't been rabbiting. Not elsewhere."

"Well, I'll be hanged!" said Captain Camber. "That's where I thought he was lying."

"Perhaps you're right. But I shouldn't believe the rest, if I were you. I don't think it happened."

"Damme, sir, we know it happened. The girl was found lying down there senseless. The doctors say she'd been hit on the head."

"Yes, I think so."

"Oh, you do believe that! Well, what's the matter with the boy's story?"

"It's a good story. But it don't fit the facts. He says there were two women here and there's only one woman's footprints. He says a woman and a man were embracin' on the ground and the heather isn't crushed anywhere. He says Miss Daymer was hit in a quarrel and she was hit by a man who came up behind her. Look at the footprints. His toes to her heels. He says Charles hit her. The man who hit her came from behind that gorse. He'd been chewing tobacco and spit-

ting. I don't care for Charles myself. He's too sprightly. But he don't spit!"

"Good gad!" said Lomas. "That lets these two out."

"You mean to say I've got no evidence at all, sir!" cried Captain Camber.

"My dear fellow! Oh, my dear fellow! Lots of evidence," Mr. Fortune murmured. "There's our Albert. Albert was up here."

"Of course he was up here. We brought him."

Mr. Fortune gazed at Captain Camber with patient wonder. "Yes, captain. Quite so. There's his footmarks. He shuffles, doesn't he? But look. There's his footmarks too, coming by the gorse. We didn't bring him there. He was up there beside the gentleman who wears nailed boots with toe and heel pieces, the gentleman who spits, the gentleman who came behind Vera and knocked her out. Lots of nice evidence. Somebody's been making great use of our Albert."

"The young devil!" said Captain Camber with fury.

"Yes, I think so," Mr. Fortune smiled. "You might look into Albert."

"I'll deal with him. I'll have the truth out of him."

"Oh, no rash haste. Keep quite calm. Give Albert rope. We don't want him. We want the fellow that's behind him."

"The fellow that spits, eh?"

"I wonder." Mr. Fortune looked away at the dim blue of distant hills.

"What do you wonder?"

"The fellow that spits—or the fellow behind that fellow——"

"Well, I'll be hanged!" said Captain Camber. "You're going pretty far."

"You think so? Let's go up to the cottage, anyway." He looked at Lomas. "That's all right, old man?"

"Lord yes, if you like. But what's it all mean, Reginald? What's it for?"

"There you have me," said Mr. Fortune sadly.

"Damme, I'm glad to hear it," Captain Camber gave forth an angry laugh. "It has me beat. Crazy, I call it."

"Yes, it always was," Lomas agreed. "It gets worse as it goes on."

"Oh no, no. Quite a nice case. Only nobody's worked at it. You people are so flippant."

Captain Camber's feelings were too deep for words. His eyes swelled at Mr. Fortune. He breathed hard. Thus at very high pressure he led the way up that wet and stony lane to the cottage. Suddenly a roar came out of him. He plunged forward shouting.

"Oh Peter!" Mr. Fortune groaned and stood

still shaking his head at Lomas. "Well-meaning man. Did it all for the best."

"What's the matter with him?"

"Zeal, all zeal," Mr. Fortune sighed. "He's seen our Albert. He's mentioning it," and the fields resounded Albert's name.

The captain came back puffing and red. "Young devil, he's bolted like a rabbit. He knows he's for it."

"Yes, I fear so," said Mr. Fortune.

"What the deuce is he up to here?"

"Watching what we're doing. But we may as well do it." Mr. Fortune went on quickly.

Even as when he came to the cottage first, a brown face framed in whiskers stared at him over the broken hedge. William was still digging. But he had somebody with him, a small man, neatly bearded, in neat dark clothes who saw Captain Camber's large red face and touched his hat. "Good day, sir. I was just asking for Miss Daymer. There's nobody here but old William. I can't make out what's happened."

"What do you want with Miss Daymer, Tidford?"

"Little matter of an account, sir. Has she had an accident, sir?"

"Something like that."

"Dear, dear. Poor lady. Nothing serious, I hope?"

Mr. Fortune coughed. "I hope not," said Captain Camber solemnly and Mr. Fortune sighed. "I'm afraid your little bill will have to wait, Tidford."

"To be sure, sir. To be sure. Of course if I'd known I shouldn't have thought—but I'm in the way, captain. Good day, sir." He turned to a bicycle by the hedge and went jolting off.

William rested on the spade to stare after him. "Been here all day, William?" said Mr. Fortune.

"Ay," William turned over a spadeful of the light brown earth and stopped.

"What do you know about it?"

"Dunno nothing. They all went out in the morning. T'other ones first. Then mistress. T'other ones come back. Then police come and took 'em away. I did hear as mistress were picked up in th' old quarry dead. Dunno if it be true." His dull eyes stared at Mr. Fortune. "Do 'e know, sir?"

"Good mistress, was she?"

"Ay, surely. I be fain to know how she be."

Mr. Fortune shook his head. "A bad business," he said.

"Look here, my man," Captain Camber struck in, "do you know if any of the country folk had a quarrel with her?" Here Mr. Fortune groaned and turned away.

"They did have rare quarrels among their-

selves," said William. "Since the young man come. What I wants to know is how I be—if she be dead?"

"You carry on, my lad," said Captain Camber. "I'll look after you." William touched his forehead and resumed digging. "Well, Mr. Fortune, what now? Want to go into the house, eh?"

Mr. Fortune was looking at the ground. "Yes. I suppose so," he said slowly: and slowly followed Captain Camber.

The door stood open. "Hullo! Here's a mess," the captain cried. "Somebody's been here before us, sir. The place has been turned upside down."

Mr. Fortune looked round his shoulder. "Well, it's possible. But I doubt it. There was just as much mess yesterday."

"Queer way to live," the captain muttered. "Beg your pardon, Mr. Lomas."

"Don't mind me. If you can think of anything adequate, say it. I can't."

They moved about in the chaos, Lomas looking for letters, the captain looking at everything. After some time he emitted an exclamation. He had discovered the printing press. "Look at this, Mr. Lomas. What were they doing with this, please?"

"Heaven only knows."

"If you don't mind my saying so, it looks as if there might be something in that idea about forged notes being printed here."

"I don't mind your saying so. But it don't make sense," said Lomas.

"Thank you. I dare say I'm as good a judge of that as you, sir."

The voice of Mr. Fortune arose. "Oh don't blether," it said irritably. "They weren't printing notes, of course. Etchings. Woodcuts. You'll find some of the stuff under the dirty plates. They think they're artists, heaven forgive them."

Captain Camber snorted and sought these works of art and surveyed them with disgust while Lomas laughed. He flung them down and marched on Mr. Fortune who was bent over the old oak chest peering at its rough worm-eaten inscription. "What have you got, sir?"

"I haven't the slightest idea," said Mr. Fortune.

"Anything in the old thing?" The captain opened it to behold a tumbled mass of women's clothes. "Humph. Just like 'em. Well, gentlemen, I've got no more time to waste in this mess. My notion is we'd better lock the place up, get back to Stanchester and see if these two people we've arrested have got anything to say for themselves."

Mr. Fortune straightened himself. "I shouldn't wonder if Isabel says quite a lot," he said and lounged out.

But half-way down the garden Captain Camber halted. "Hallo! Where's that fellow William?" He shouted to an empty world.

"I infer he's gone to look for Albert," Mr. Fortune murmured. "I thought he would. You see, you're so frank, captain."

"What do you mean, sir?"

"Well, you tell 'em all what they've got to expect. You told Albert to look out for himself. You told Tidford Miss Daymer wasn't dead. You told William you had a notion some country fellow did the job."

"I told them?" Captain Camber roared.

"Oh Lord, yes. You showed your hand," Lomas assured him.

"What do you mean? What's William got to do with it?"

"Look. There's William's footprints: nails, toe-pieces, heel-pieces. There's where William was spitting."

The captain grew red. "You mean to say you made sure he's the man?"

"Not sure, no. There are probably others in the country-side who chew and spit and wear this kind of boot. But William is indicated."

"Might have warned me, mightn't you?" Captain Camber growled.

"I'm sorry," said Mr. Fortune meekly. "I did what I could. Ask Tidford sometime. He noticed it."

Captain Camber glared. "Tidford? What do you mean? What do you keep dragging in Tidford for? What's he got to do with it?"

"I think our Mr. Tidford could tell you why it all happened."

"Tidford? He's a dealer in antiques."

"Yes. I thought he was."

"Oh, did you! And why do you suppose he wanted to kill Miss Daymer?"

"I think he wanted her antiques," said Mr. Fortune.

"Damme, sir, that's not sense. He could have bought the place for a song, lock, stock and barrel, any time before she came. Tidford's not the man to be mixed up in any foul play. He's been in Stanchester all his life, ay, and his father before him. Most respectable people."

"You think so? And why did the respectable Tidford hurry up to see William at the cottage as soon as the girl was knocked on the head?"

"I'll be hanged if I know," Captain Camber puffed. "Damme, the more you find, the crazier it looks." He pushed back his hat and wiped a damp head. "Do you think you see your way, sir? I don't."

"But it's quite simple. Do the work that's nearest though it's dull at whiles. On returnin' to civilization send a hefty constable or so to spend the night at the cottage, appoint some unobtrusive fellows to watch Mr. Tidford's business and then have a heart-to-heart talk with Isabel and Charles. Meanwhile your men might look for William and

Albert in their wonted haunts. From all which the fundamental facts may emerge. But I don't think so myself."

"Not very hopeful, are you?"

"No. No. Not hopeful. Only patient."

They left Captain Camber in the village barking questions about Albert; they took their own car back to Stanchester. "If Vera can speak that may clear it all up," Lomas said.

"Oh no, no," Mr. Fortune murmured.

"Well, I'd like you to see her, Reginald."

"My dear old thing! Of course I will." Mr. Fortune shut his eyes and lay limp.

He was upstairs in the hospital some time. He came down and smiled at Lomas. "I believe she'll be all right. Bad concussion. Nothing worse. Skull not fractured. No spinal injury. I shouldn't worry, old thing."

"Still unconscious?"

"Oh yes. Yes. It'll be a long business, poor girl." Mr. Fortune's mind seemed to be withdrawn. He wandered out dreamily.

The car took them to the police station. Captain Camber had been asking for them. Captain Camber was very brisk but a little embarrassed. He had made all his arrangements, he was just going to have these people brought up, he didn't quite know—perhaps Mr. Fortune——

"Oh Lord, no," said Mr. Fortune.

"All right, captain," said Lomas and took charge.

Isabel and Charles were produced, dishevelled, startled, angry. Lomas wished them to understand the position. They were charged on the evidence of a boy, Albert Small, who said he had seen it, with an attack on Miss Daymer. It was right to tell them that investigation did not support the charge. But Miss Daymer had been injured and was still unconscious. Could they throw any light on the matter?"

"Isn't she going to die?" Isabel cried.

"We hope not."

"They told us she was dead. How wicked! How perfectly wicked!"

"Rotten," said Charles. "But I say, is she going to be all right, sir?"

"We hope so."

"Well!" Isabel looked at Charles and began to cry. Charles also showed signs of emotion and Captain Camber became very uncomfortable. But Lomas watched them with professional interest and after a minute scrawled on a piece of paper and pushed across to Mr. Fortune this message:

"You win. Nails but no toe-piece or heel-piece." Mr. Fortune contemplated it with pensive lack of interest.

Isabel dried her eyes—quelled her sobs—exploded. It was utterly beastly of them. Of course Charles

never did it. Just the very last person. What did they suppose he came to the horrid place for?

Here Charles flushed and muttered something about going easy.

Isabel was not to be checked. She turned fiercely upon Mr. Fortune. "You know perfectly well."

Mr. Fortune's mouth was open a long moment before he could speak. "Me?" he gasped. "Did you mean me?"

"Don't try and play tricks. Do you think I don't remember you? You came spying on us yesterday. You must have seen. (Oh shut up, Charles.) Charles and Vera are as good as engaged."

"I hadn't thought of that," said Mr. Fortune humbly. "My mistake."

"Oh I see now!" she cried. "You have been clever. You thought because he was with me and Vera was horrid to him, it was me he wanted and she was jealous. That was bright! Of course she was being horrid. She's proud, she knows she can't help liking him and she hates it. It's been so jolly for me."

"Yes. All my apologies. But I haven't done anything. I hadn't even an opinion about you. This is all very natural and human and interestin' and I sympathize deeply. But it don't clear things up. Why did Albert tell this tale?"

"Albert is a horror. He's been the plague of our lives." Albert was always lurking, Albert was

always playing tricks, Albert was always making mischief. In their troubles with tradesmen, with farmers, in the hostility of the village she saw the hand of Albert. "I don't know why the wretched youth hates us. But there it is. I suppose he's just a natural fiend."

"Yes. Any other fiends?" said Mr. Fortune.

"Everybody's been horrid. They've made things just as awkward as they could. But I believe it's really all Albert."

"Yes, yes. Did it ever occur to you that somebody wanted to get you out of that cottage?"

"Whatever for?" said Miss Villaret. "Why should they? Horrid barn of a place. It had been empty for ages when Vera took it. I wish she'd never seen it."

"Nobody ever made you an offer for it?"

"Why? Yes, I believe there was somebody," Vera said. "Some agent wrote to her. She turned him down."

"Of course you don't know who he was? No. You wouldn't. I wonder. Have you ever got rid of any of the old stuff in the place?"

"Oh yes, Vera sold an old oak cupboard thing, all falling to pieces. The man in Stanchester bought it, Tidford, the man we got our furniture from."

"Was there anything in it?"

"Only some books and papers. Awful old stuff. Sermons and things like that."

"I say, you know," Charles broke in. "This is all very well, sir. But I mean to say you're not getting anywhere. I want to know who it was slogged Vera."

"I don't blame you," said Captain Camber. "We are a bit off the line. Now"—a police inspector come in, begged pardon, sir, whispered to him. His large red face split in a smile.—"Now I'll just ask you to wait awhile. We'll make you quite comfortable. Bit of dinner, eh? We can manage that." He bustled the two bewildered creatures out and turning clapped Mr. Fortune on the back. "I've got 'em, my lad. All the three of 'em. My fellows caught Albert and William coming round to Tidford's back door. Brought 'em all along." He rubbed his hands and chuckled. "You think we're dull dogs down here. But we don't miss much, eh?"

Lomas laughed.

Mr. Fortune lay back and gazed at him. "Splendid, captain. I don't know how you can do it. All my congratulations. Now you've got everything except evidence."

"Ah, I'll soon have that," said Captain Camber.

His confidence was justified. He knew how to deal with Albert. He scolded, he commanded, and a frightened lout was soon whimpering the truth. Mr. Tidford told Albert as they had to be cleared out of that cottage. Mr. Tidford told

Albert all about what he was to do making trouble for them. Gave him five shillings a week for it. But it was William as done it. Albert never touched the lady. He wouldn't have, not for nothing. Mr. Tidford told him what he was to say. But he never did no harm to her, no really he didn't, captain.

The methods of Captain Camber had some success with William too. William was tougher stuff than the boy. He could not be frightened. His power of holding his tongue endured till his dull mind was convinced that the captain knew enough to bring him in guilty. Then "'Twas Tidford," he growled. "Tidford would have her put away. I done what he said." And he supplied details.

But with Mr. Tidford, Captain Camber failed completely. Mr. Tidford, neat, composed, master of himself, let the captain talk. He knew nothing, he would explain nothing. If he was to be charged, a smile, a wave of the hand suggested the folly of the charge against so respectable a man, he would know how to defend himself.

"You'll be charged, my man," Captain Camber assured him. "No answer, eh? Well, perhaps you know best." He sent Mr. Tidford away and looked at Lomas.

"He was in it all right," Lomas pronounced "I should say so! That's a case, eh?"

But Mr. Fortune sat in a dreary heap making letters on a sheet of paper. "Well, Reginald?"

"Oh yes, yes. You've got the men."

"What more do you want?" cried Captain Camber.

Mr. Fortune stared at his inscription. "I want my dinner primarily," he murmured.

"That's up to me," said Captain Camber jovially.

But the admirable mutton and the tolerable port of Captain Camber did not avail to cheer Mr. Fortune. While the captain explained his own genius in handling the affair, while Lomas, loquacious and sprightly, demonstrated the advantages of getting the silly girls out of the business without scandal, he sat in a cloud of smoke and made inarticulate murmurs, till at last "Reginald! We're not interesting you," Lomas reproached him.

"Oh yes. I heard every word. I quite agree. I was just thinking."

"What's your trouble?" Captain Camber smiled and passed the port.

"Reginald!" said Lomas severely. "What have you got up your sleeve?"

"I don't know. I don't know if it's anything." He took out a piece of paper on which was written Y AI IOX IO IO EPIKALL H. "What do you make of that?"

Captain Camber read it out in a jocose manner. "Y, ai! Iox, io, io, epikall. What are you giving us, sir? Where did you get it from?"

"It's carved on that fifteenth-century chest in the cottage. Later work than the chest though. There are other letters, but I couldn't make them out."

"It wouldn't make sense, anyway. Iox, io, io!" The captain laughed. "What about it?"

"Do you read it as cipher, Reginald?" Lomas asked.

"I don't read it at all. I don't know what it is. But it's very interesting."

"I'm no hand at cryptograms, myself," Captain Camber announced. "But what's the good of it, anyway? We've got our case."

"Yes. In a way. We've got the respectable Tidford——"

"By the short hairs," Captain Camber chuckled. "Don't you worry."

"But we haven't got what he was after. Why did he want to get the girls out of the cottage? The provisional hypothesis is there was something in the place he wanted."

"Then why the deuce didn't he get it before they came?"

"Yes, that was a difficulty. But you heard Isabel's story. They sold him an old cupboard full of books and papers. That's where he got the tip. He put on an agent to buy the cottage. They wouldn't deal. Then he put on Albert and Co. to make the place too hot to hold them. That didn't

work. So he arranged to have Vera knocked out and the other two accused of the crime. Very neat scheme. If we hadn't blown in, he'd have had the cottage empty for as long as he needed. It's all quite clear except two things. What was it our Tidford wanted so bad? And I'm afraid he won't tell us that. Secondly, where is it? That I fancy he don't know, or William would have got it for him."

"I don't know what there could be," Captain Camber declared. "The place was only a barn in the old days. You can see that. It's been a labourer's cottage the last century. Not much hidden treasure about."

"I wonder," Mr. Fortune murmured. And again contemplated the letters Y AI IOX IO IO EPIKALL H.

"Queer sort of cipher," Lomas frowned. "The repetitions aren't reasonable. Io three times over, Reginald."

"Yes. Very improbable. I wonder."

"What do you want to do?"

"I want to see the books our Tidford found in the old cupboard."

"All right. All right," Captain Camber chuckled. "Dig 'em out to-morrow, sir. Iox, io, io!"

In the morning a search party dealt with Mr. Tidford's shop and his scared assistant. The cupboard from the cottage was discovered, the

books which had been in it, a pile of decaying theology. Captain Camber facetiously swore that Mr. Fortune would know a lot when he had worked through that. But Mr. Fortune's researches were not profound. Having discovered that the books had belonged to one Gualt. Hailes S.T.P. he sought the neat private apartments of Mr. Tidford. There by the respectable man's bedside was a fat book bound in rough crumbling calf inscribed on the first page Diurna, Gualt. Hailes. "Yes. I thought our Tidford wouldn't leave it lying about," Mr. Fortune murmured.

"What is it?"

"It's the diary of Walter Hailes, D.D., in the years 1640 onwards," He turned yellow quarto pages full of cramped writing.

"Good gad!" said Lomas. "My poor Reginald. Dr. Hailes was a fluent fellow. Not even English, is it?"

"Some of it's English. Rather ready with his classics though. I wonder." He looked up at Lomas with a slow, benign smile. "Well, well. A little earnest study is indicated." He tucked the book under his arm and marched off.

Lomas, coming back to the hotel for lunch, found him in the courtyard flirting with the Persian cat of the house, a proud cat. "Is this industry, Reginald?" he said severely. "What of your divine?"

"This is dalliance. Isn't it, Artaxerxes?" He caressed the cat's ear and received a low, plaintive curse. "Here's our naval officer, brisk and breezy. Come on. I've got grayling for lunch."

They sat down to it and Captain Camber also made haste to ask how he had got on with the parson. Mr. Fortune passed him the menu. "I sometimes wonder whether I like grayling as much as I think I do," he explained. "I've never had it often enough to be quite sure." He tasted the Sauterne anxiously and sighed. "Well, well. Life is full of uncertainties. Do you think this is the right wine for grayling?"

"It's good enough for me, sir. Yquem, is it?"

"Oh no, no. La Tour Blanche. But I wonder. Perhaps something drier——"

"You are pensive, Reginald," Lomas smiled. "Did you draw a blank with the divine?"

"I am not pensive," Mr. Fortune was pained. "I like to treat serious things seriously," and did so. It was not till they had passed by way of duckling to peaches that he came back to earth. "You were asking about my parson. Yes. He's a dear old thing. Dr. Walter Hailes came to Hill Barn when the Puritans chucked him out of his living. It used to be the tithe-barn of the abbey at Cele. That was all gone even in his time—destroyed at the Reformation. He's very sad about that. He was a high old churchman as near a Roman

Catholic as no matter. The local squire let him stay up there in the barn. Sir Amyas Boileau—old family in what he calls the great house. I don't know where it was."

"Over at Cele Regis, sir. That's gone too. The Boileau family died out long ago."

"Yes. I rather fancy Dr. Hailes saw the last of them."

"All very interesting, Reginald. But it doesn't take us anywhere."

"No, no. But it's suggestive."

"Is it? I don't see Mr. Tidford losing much sleep over this."

"Well, I think he'd found something more. I think this is what started our Tidford on his career of crime. In August, 1644: 'Comes Tho. Hewings with news that the crop eared rogues have sent summons to my lady. So I to the great house to take counsel. God guide all.' The next day Dr. Hailes drops into Latin: 'Hodie reliquias oblitae eheu gloriae ex magna domo in pusillam tabernam lacrimans gaudensque recepi et in secretum condidi. Quo usque Domine?' He received the relics of a glory—alas! forgotten—from the great house into his puny hut with tears and joy and put them into a secret place. And he says 'How long, oh Lord?'"

"Oh, that's it, is it? The padre had the Boileau family jewels!" Captain Camber cried. "But in 1644! You wouldn't expect to find 'em now."

"Our Tidford expected to find 'em."

"Nothing more in the diary, Reginald?" said Lomas.

"No. Nothing to be sure of. There's some odd prayers in Greek."

"He wouldn't pray about the squire's jewels," Captain Camber objected. "You mean to say Tidford had nothing more to work on than that?"

"Well, I should guess there is a local tradition of stuff from the big house being hidden. He'd know that. And this gave him the clue."

"But he'd have to pull the place to bits."

Again Lomas saw on Mr. Fortune's face a slow benign smile. "I object to the mirth, Reginald," he complained, "you are also being superior. What have you kept from us?"

"I'm not. I wouldn't. There's only this." On the menu card he wrote again the letters Y AI IOX IO IO EPIKALL H.

"That cipher, eh?" Captain Camber growled.

"No. I don't think it's cipher. Come along. We'll go out to Hill Barn and try."

They arrived at that lonely cottage and the large constable in charge opened the door. But Mr. Fortune did not go in. He wandered here and there on the outskirts of the garden. "It's only a chance, you know. But that is rather a fine tree." He stopped beneath the ancient oak. "He was

here in 1644 and quite a big fellow then. Can the constabulary dig, captain?"

The constable was anxious to do so and the brown earth flew. The spade struck splinters of old wood. There came out an iron-bound box, its hinges rusting asunder. Mr. Fortune knelt over it and drew out a shapeless mass wrapped in leather. From that emerged to the sunlight two strange things that glittered and flashed: tarnished gold, blue and white enamel wrought about cylinders of rock crystal and set above with gems.

"What in the world are they?" cried Captain Camber. "Don't look like anything."

"No. They're not common. They are reliquaries. Things made to contain holy relics. Quite old." Mr. Fortune was handling them delicately. "Look. You can make it out. LIGNUM CRUCIS. The wood of the Cross. That's what Dr. Hailes wanted to save. I suppose they came from the shrine in the old abbey. The Boileau family saved them when that was destroyed. When the Puritan troops came to the Boileau's house, Dr. Hailes had to hide them. Well, well." He lifted them reverently. "The wood of the Cross. That's what our Tidford put up his murder for. A queer world."

"Well, I suppose they're worth thousands," said Captain Camber.

"Oh yes, yes. Anything you please. That didn't occur to Dr. Walter Hailes."

"And you got at 'em out of that bit of cipher! What is it? Iox, io, io?" Captain Camber gazed at him.

"It wasn't cipher. It was Greek. I ought to have known that at first. My error. I only got at it when I found Dr. Hailes was so fond of the classics. He wanted to leave some record and he thought, bless him, only the right sort of man would understand it if he put it in Greek. You see? Y is U, of course, and X is CH and P is R and H is E. Then some of the lost letters came in easy and I saw it must be Homer and turned it up at the grammar school. Here you are." He filled in the gaps. "HUP AIGIOCHOIO DIOS PERIKALLEI PHEGO. Under the beautiful oak of ægis-bearing Zeus. Quite simple."

A solemn silence reigned. Lomas first recovered consciousness. "Quite," he gasped. "Oh, quite. I feel that. But I'm afraid Mr. Tidford will be annoyed about it."

THE QUIET LADY

"WHY do people commit crimes, Fortune?" said Dr. Birtwistle. Mr. Fortune sighed and gazed at him with large reproachful eyes. They were lying in heather on a western hill. A merry wind played with the sunshine, and the glow of cornland and pastures peacock green were displayed to the far dark gleam of the sea. The gifts of a well-planned lunch basket suffused benignity in body and mind. It was a blunder to talk. If the man must talk, he should talk of his garden, of those bewildering lilies which had brought Mr. Fortune into the west, of his most enviable delphiniums. But "Why do people commit crimes?" said old Dr. Birtwistle. "I have frequently wondered."

"Conceit," Reggie Fortune murmured.

Dr. Birtwistle stroked his little white beard and pondered. "I am not sure that I grasp that," he said slowly. He is very like a wise, old-fashioned child.

"Fellow thinks he's a very important fellow," Reggie said sleepily. "Ought to have more than he's got. Ought to have his own way. So he takes it. Vanity of vanities, all is vanity."

Again Dr. Birtwistle thought it out. "That is very interesting," he said brightly. "But if I am rightly informed, there are a good many cases in which the criminal cannot hope to gain anything by his crime."

"Oh Lord, yes," Reggie Fortune groaned. "It happens. Conceit, doctor. Desire to show what a wonderful fellow he is. To prove his powe over people's lives. Some fellows will do anything for that. Conceit. Napoleon and Bluebeard and the club bore. Same sort of fellow." Reggie yawned and stood up.

Dr. Birtwistle driving his car is like a good little girl allowed to push the perambulator. He enjoys it immensely, it is very careful, very safe and wonderfully slow. Nevertheless they all but bumped a youth on a bicycle. He shot out of a drive across their front wheels. Dr. Birtwistle played a fantasia on the horn and turned the car into the bank. Reggie's feet went up. Reggie's head made contact with the hood. "I beg your pardon," said Dr. Birtwistle with emotion.

"Don't mind me. I'm never sea-sick."

The cyclist looked over his shoulder, jammed on his brake and called out "Hey, doctor!" tried to turn and fell off. He picked himself up grinning broadly at the tilted car. "Hey, doctor, I was going for you. You'm wanted up to the house. Master's took bad."

"You're a careless fellow, Amos," said Dr. Birtwistle severely. "Let this be a lesson to you." He let the car down to the level in a series of jerks. "I'm sure you'll excuse me, Fortune. I ought to go."

"Oh, my dear chap!" Reggie murmured. "Carry on, carry on."

The car backed and turned into the drive in slow time and proceeded solemnly between hedges of camellias. "In point of fact," said Dr. Birtwistle, "Mr. Wissenden is not a patient of mine."

"His error," Reggie murmured.

The wind danced about them again. They came out to an open space above the valley and there amid lawns and roses stood a comfortable house of red stone. As the car stopped an old manservant came out. He was lean and bent, his black clothes hung upon him like a scarecrow's, but his long bony face spoke of vigour.

"Well, Hawken, here I am." Dr. Birtwistle smiled and rubbed his hands.

"Thank you, sir. Would you come this way?"

It was not into the house that he led the doctor but away through the garden.

"Well, well," said Reggie and stooped under the wind-screen to light a cigar and made himself comfortable again. As he lay back he saw a face at an upper window, a woman's face framed in smooth black hair, eager and troubled. She saw him; he

was not what she expected to see; when she knew that he saw her she vanished.

In a fluttering hurry Dr. Birtwistle returned. "Fortune—would you be so very kind—I really think this is more in your way than mine—I should be so much obliged——"

"Oh my aunt!" said Reggie and flung his cigar to the roses.

On the other side the house the ground fell away to the sea and the garden was planned in broad steps of flowers. Along the house was a terrace with crazy pavement in which saxifrage grew, and beneath it six feet of rock and rock plants. On the terrace stood a table bearing a glass and a fountain pen. Beside it a chair was overturned. Below, on the path below the rock garden, lay a man's body, bent and still, which had shed some blood.

Dr. Birtwistle ran down the steps to the path, turned and looked back. Reggie was not following him. Reggie stood still by the table.

The old butler, who was being held in talk by a gardener, watched him curiously. "The master did often use to sit there, sir," he called out. "He like the sea wind, he would say."

"Yes. Lots of wind, isn't there?" Reggie said and slowly went on to the body. "Who found him?"

"I did, sir," the old butler said sharply. "When

he didn't come in to lunch, I went to look for him. He was lying just like that."

"You touched nothing?"

"I touched him, sir. When I spoke to him and he didn't answer. I felt he was dead. I didn't move him. I called the gardener to see no one meddled and I sent Amos to fetch Dr. Birtwistle."

"That's right, Mr. Hawken," the gardener put in. "No one ain't come nigh. And I ain't had my dinner." He grinned at the strangers.

"You can go get it now," the butler frowned.

Reggie knelt down beside the dead man. The legs were drawn up, the body curved. There was a scalp wound and the face was grazed and cut. He looked close, his hands moved here and there, and he rose and contemplated the butler. "Yes. You must send for the police," he said.

"I've done that, sir."

"Ah. You haven't lost much time."

"I felt sure he'd had foul play."

"Yes. Well, you'd better tell them about it. We'll wait for them here."

"Thank you, sir," the butler accepted his dismissal.

Reggie watched the gaunt bent figure glide away. "Not one of our genial spirits," he murmured.

"But it is a horrible affair, Fortune," Dr. Birtwistle protested. "No wonder the poor fellow is upset."

"Upset? You think so?"

"Oh, Hawken is devoted to his master. He has been here all his life. It must be a terrible shock to him, poor fellow." Dr. Birtwistle wiped his eyes. "Terrible. So mysterious too, isn't it? I find it quite baffling, Fortune. There is so much blood from those small wounds."

"Yes. Very high blood pressure."

"But such trivial wounds could not cause death."

"No. No. He didn't die of his wounds."

"And that extraordinary appearance. Did you notice the flush and the dilated eyes?"

Reggie Fortune smiled. "Yes. I did notice it. Yes. Poison was used. Probably some alkaloid of the atropine family."

"Poison? Atropine? Oh, my dear Fortune! What a horrible thing. But the wounds?"

"Ah, I don't think the wounds were intentional. Just a by-product. The poison was administered, possibly in that drink he had; it was getting to work when he fell from the terrace and hit the rockery and cut his head. There's blood on those violas. The poison had set his heart jumping, he bled fast and died."

"But that's bewildering!"

"Yes. Yes. There are other curious features." He took out his pocket-book and glanced round the garden and up at the house. No one could be seen. He knelt by the dead man and took from his trouser

leg several long dark wavy hairs and put them in an envelope.

"What is it, Fortune?"

"I don't know. I don't think we'd better miss anything, that's all."

"I can't tell you how glad I am you are here."

"My dear fellow! Oh my dear fellow!" Reggie smiled. "Have you got a pill-box or so and a clean bottle in the car?"

"I have really nothing with me. But I could get things from the house."

"Wash the bottle out yourself, do you mind? Thanks very much."

Dr. Birtwistle hurried away. Reggie turned and faced the gusty wind a moment, then with his back to it strolled away across the garden. Something white caught in a row of dwarf polyantha roses attracted him: sheets of paper stamped with the name of Midford House, unused, blank. He left them where they had been blown to and strolled on. Among the begonias lay another sheet. Something was written on that, large, sprawling words:

"I can't move. My head is bursting. The drink Lily Dean brought me. I was well before. I know I am dying. Lily Dean. That rascal. She has——"

A blot made an end.

Reggie put it in his pocket. There were brisk steps and a loud voice on the terrace. He strolled back to meet them.

Dr. Birtwistle, a cardboard box in one hand, a soda-water bottle in the other, was fluttering about a large stiff man with a fierce moustache. In the background remained another man, the model, the ideal policeman, in spite of his plain clothes.

"Ah, Fortune, here you are!" Dr. Birtwistle cried. "This is Mr. Fortune, major, Mr. Reginald Fortune, who is very kindly giving me his assistance. Major Smythe, our chief constable, Fortune."

Reggie bowed. Major Smythe grunted. "You're Mr. Fortune? The Scotland Yard expert, eh?" His voice was of the orderly room. "I don't mind your assisting the doctor if he wants you."

"Thanks so much."

"But I'm not asking for Scotland Yard assistance, d'ye understand? Now then. Superintendent!" The two of them marched upon the dead body briskly, looked at it, moved it about, conferred together and Reggie watched them with sad, patient eyes. Briskly they marched back and halted. "The man didn't die a natural death," Major Smythe announced.

"You think not?" Reggie murmured.

"I've seen many a man die of wounds, sir. They don't look like that poor fellow. Dirty work here, very dirty work. Wissenden was poisoned."

"Are you going to swear that?" Reggie asked with interest.

The chief constable swallowed. "That's the doctor's opinion too, sir."

"Oh, yes. Yes. Dr. Birtwistle's opinion is a very good opinion."

The chief constable glared. The chief constable turned on his heel. "Er—doctor! You'll make your examination and let me know the result. Superintendent! Have the body removed."

"But you're not going, are you?" Reggie said plaintively.

The chief constable swung round upon him. "I'm going on with my investigations, sir."

"Oh yes, do. Several curious features."

"What do you mean?"

"Well"—Reggie spread out his hands—"don't you see?" He moved backwards.

The chief constable looked at the table, took up the glass. A little liquid remained in it. "Might have been poison in this, eh?" He peered, smelt and grunted. "Lemonade!"

"No. Barley-water."

The chief constable made a petulant noise.

"Quite so. That's our department," Reggie took the glass away from him. "I didn't mean that."

"What do you mean?"

Reggie sighed. "Well, the pen, for instance."

The chief constable took it up. "What about it? Wissenden's own pen, I suppose. I'll soon find that out."

"It's his pen all right," said Reggie wearily.

The chief constable marched himself off, a most military sight.

"Well, well," Reggie sighed. He took the bottle from Dr. Birtwistle, poured the liquid from the glass into it and gave both to the doctor. The superintendent lingered watching him. He knelt down on the crazy pavement and with care cut out a tuft of saxifrage and put it in the cardboard box.

"What's that, sir?" said the superintendent softly.

"That," said Reggie, "is a little blood."

The superintendent looked about him. "Blood up here on the terrace? But he hurt his head falling on those rocks down there."

"Yes. The point is well taken," Reggie smiled.

The stolid constabulary face smiled back. "The major didn't see that, sir."

"No. The major didn't see it."

"Is there anything else, sir?"

"No. No. I think I've got everything." Reggie followed the chief constable and coming in sight of his back at the turn of the house hailed it. "Major! One moment."

The major halted, turned red and frowning, waited for his leisurely arrival. "Damme, sir, look alive. I've no time to waste. What do you want now?"

"I want to know who saw the dead man alive

last and when : who brought him his barley-water and when : and where it came from."

"You do, do you ? Who's managing this case, you or me ? "

"Nobody. That's what I complain of."

"I'm not to be spoken to like this, sir."

"Oh yes. If and when necessary. But I'm not thinking about you." (The chief constable breathed hard.) "I'm thinking of the man that's dead : of who killed him : and who may be accused of murder if you go muddlin' on."

"Muddling, sir ? " The chief constable flinched. "Come, come, there's no occasion to lose our tempers."

"No. Remember that."

"Beg your pardon," the chief constable grunted. "You were saying—people might be accused of the murder. Do you mean anybody in particular, Mr. Fortune ? "

"I mean everybody : everybody who was here this morning : or who wasn't."

"Ha, that's helpful, isn't it ? "

"Yes. I think so. Avoid vulgar prejudice. And begin at the beginning ! "

"The beginning ? "

"The butler. He seemed to have something on his mind."

"I've known Hawken forty years. He's been with the Wissendens all his life."

"He don't look as if he'd liked it."

"Wissenden wasn't an easy man," the chief constable said with reluctance.

"You didn't like him?"

"Point of fact, I don't know that anybody liked him. He was a lonely fellow, Mr. Fortune. Gloomy fellow. But I'd swear Hawken was devoted to him."

They went to the house, they took the gaunt old butler into the library. In his most military voice the chief constable wanted to hear what Hawken knew about the murder.

Hawken was not frightened, he was fluent and clear, even eager. After breakfast, about ten o'clock, Mr. Wissenden went out to walk in the garden with Miss Dean. About eleven Miss Dean came in to fetch him a glass of barley-water and came back again, leaving him alone. There was nothing unusual in all that. No one saw him afterwards till, a little after one, Hawken went out to remind him of lunch and found him dead.

"Men working in the garden, weren't there?" said Reggie.

"In the kitchen garden, sir. It's out of sight of the terrace. Mr. Wissenden would never have the gardeners work where he was."

"I see. About this barley-water. Where did she get it?"

"In the dining-room, sir. I always keep a decanter there. Mr. Wissenden drank it at all hours." The butler sighed. "He drank nothing else."

"Who makes it?"

"I prepare it myself, sir."

"I'd better have that decanter."

The butler went out.

"There won't be anything in it, of course," Reggie murmured.

The chief constable stared. "Then why the devil do you ask him for it?"

"Oh, it rouses interest."

The butler came back with a decanter nearly full. "None was drunk at lunch, sir," he explained.

"Well, I suppose there wasn't any lunch."

"Miss Dean did take something, sir. She generally drinks barley-water. But not to-day."

"Damme, I should think not!" the chief constable exploded.

"No. Who is Miss Dean, Hawken?" Reggie said.

The butler looked at the chief constable. "A kind of cousin of the master's. So I always understood."

"That's right. Distant cousin, Fortune. Wissenden got hold of her when his sister set up house for herself two years ago. Miss Dean's been keeping house for him ever since. Like a daughter to him

—companion to him, mistress of the house and so forth. Eh, Hawken?"

The butler had coughed. "Just so, sir," he said.

"How did she get on with Mr. Wissenden?"

Again the butler looked at the chief constable. Again he seemed to suggest that these questions were not quite nice. "Miss Dean is a very quiet lady," he said carefully.

"She is," the chief constable chuckled. "I never could get a word out of her. Wissenden liked that, eh, Hawken?"

"Yes, sir. Mr. Wissenden used to make a great deal of her." He hesitated. "I beg pardon, sir. Hadn't you better ask Miss Dean herself?"

"What?" said Reggie sharply.

"You'll excuse me, sir. It's not for me to say what I might happen to hear between them. Miss Dean could tell you."

"You heard something you weren't meant to hear?"

"Sir!" The butler straightened his bent back. "I've been with the master, man and boy. He knew me. He didn't mind what I knew about him. I've had him say to me I was the only friend he had."

"Begad, Hawken," said the chief constable; "I believe you were."

"I hope not, sir." The butler looked at him

reproachfully and the chief constable cleared his throat and blew his nose.

But Mr. Fortune was less affected. "Well, what did you know about him?" he asked.

The butler turned to meet cold, searching eyes. "Nothing anyway bad," he said defiantly. "He was always a good, kind master."

"Yes. And what did you hear him say to Miss Dean?"

"If you will have it, sir—he said she'd be the death of him."

"He didn't say how?"

"I did think it was a manner of speaking, sir."

"She wasn't being nice to him?"

"She used to. Till this year. Till this young gentleman of hers came along."

"Oh. The master didn't take to Miss Dean's young gentleman?"

"If you ask me, sir, it's that made the trouble." The butler drew a deep breath.

"Yes. Now we'll ask her."

"If you please, sir." The butler withdrew.

Reggie turned to the chief constable. "Worked up to that neatly, didn't he?" he said and his round face was pale and stern. "Not quite a nice man, our Mr. Hawken."

"Damn it, sir, the fellow's devoted to his master."

"Yes. Anything else occur to you?"

"About Miss Dean?"

"Oh no. About him. He wasn't surprised I was interested in the barley-water. He had a notion his master was poisoned."

"What about it? So have you."

"Yes. But he isn't a doctor. He sees his master dead and bleeding—and he takes it quite natural we look for poison. That's very interesting."

"You sent for me," a low voice said to them.

Reggie sprang up. The woman was in the room and the door shut. She must have been very quiet. And the butler must have found her mighty quick. She might have been just outside. She might have heard several things she ought not to know.

"Ah, Miss Dean." The chief constable got on his feet. "Er—deeply regret—very sad affair—sorry to trouble you—must take your statement."

"Yes," she said and that was all.

"This is Mr. Fortune, our medical expert. Wants to know what you can tell him about——"

"About everything," said Reggie quickly.

"Yes," she said again. She looked at Reggie with dull eyes, neither curious nor frightened, waiting patiently. There was something about her queer yet familiar. He had it. She was out of date, fifty, sixty years out of date, a Victorian illustration, a portrait of a grandmother in her youth. She had the buxom shape of those lost ladies, her dress, ample and long, displayed it as they loved. She smoothed long black hair to frame her face and lie

in a mass upon her neck. And that white face, low browed, comely enough, was set in the gentle, plaintive calm of their dead ideal.

"I wonder," said Reggie half aloud; and went on: "Could you tell me if Mr. Wissenden had good health?"

It was a moment before the quiet voice answered, "I don't know."

"What, what?" the chief constable cried. "Never had a day's illness, did he?"

"He would never see a doctor down here. He often complained that he wasn't well."

"Down here," Reggie repeated. "Did he go to a doctor anywhere else?"

"I don't know."

"I never heard him complain of anything," the chief constable declared.

Miss Dean did not argue about it. She looked at him with meek and melancholy wonder.

"I'm afraid this is all very distressing for you." Reggie set her a chair. She bowed, she sat down with her hands in her lap and he saw that she wore an engagement ring. "Could you tell me—what do you think was the matter with him, Miss Dean?"

"I don't know."

"No symptoms at all?"

She waited some time to answer that. "He has been complaining very often. He was"—she could not find a word—"fretful."

"You've been here a long time. Was he always the same?"

"He was always very interested in himself. If things weren't just as he wanted he was—difficult."

"But there's been no change lately? Nothing happened to upset him?"

She blushed. "I suppose Hawken has told you. It is this year. Since January. Mr. Wissenden didn't approve of my engagement. He has been very angry about that." She paused. "It seems that he thought I should stay with him for ever!" she cried.

"Yes, yes. And now about this morning. He was quite normal?"

"I don't know. Normal—it's so hard to say. He was rather cross and nervous. He took me out to walk with him, then he sent me in again to get him some barley-water and I brought it and asked him if I should sit with him and he said 'no'—he said 'Good God, no'—and I left him sitting on the terrace and I never saw him again."

"You haven't been out to see him?" the chief constable cried.

"Hawken told me he was dead," said the quiet voice and the chief constable snorted.

"Yes. Quite," Reggie murmured. "You didn't take him anything but the glass of barley-water?"

"No, I didn't," she said quickly. "Nothing at all."

"Thank you. I don't think there's anything else now. I'm sorry to distress you, Miss Dean." She stood up quickly and Reggie moved to open the door, but she was before him, she went silently as she had come.

"Yes. A quiet lady," said Reggie.

"Quiet? My God! Heartless wench. Wissenden treated her like a daughter."

"Yes. Various notions of daughters, aren't there? His notion don't seem to have been hers."

"When a woman's hard she's a devil," said the chief constable. "She knows all about it, Fortune."

"I wonder. There was something else, you know."

"What's that?"

"Something that nobody allowed for when Wissenden was killed. The wind."

"What the devil do you mean?"

"Don't you see? Oh, my dear major! And I showed you his pen! His pen was there, it was open, but there was no paper."

"My God, he'd been writing and the paper blew away!" The chief constable started up. "That's pretty smart, Fortune! I'll have a search made at once."

"Well, we were meant to think he'd been writing, but the paper blew away. Don't worry. I inferred

that we were meant to find a document. So I did. Here it is."

The chief constable read and blood came to his face. "'The drink Lily Dean brought me. . . . I know I am dying. . . . Lily Dean. . . . She has——'" He stared at Reggie. "He knew! Poor old Wissenden! What a devil of a woman!"

"Is it his writing?" said Reggie.

The chief constable was startled. "What do you mean? It must be his. I couldn't swear to it. But I think it's his. Rather a scrawl of course. But it's like."

"It would be."

"Well, it's easily settled. Hawken can tell us."

"Yes. There is something I want to ask Hawken. But not that. I don't know if our Hawken is a handwriting expert, but he may be. Don't say anything about it to Hawken. We can verify the writing elsewhere. Wissenden's solicitor, for instance. I'd like to have a few words with Wissenden's solicitor. May I have the paper? Thanks." He put it away and crossed to the bell. "What I want to ask our Mr. Hawken is where the paper came from."

"I don't know what you mean."

"No." Reggie sighed. "I dare say you will." The butler came in. "Ah, Hawken. When Miss Dean took out the barley-water did she take out anything else?"

"Nothing that I saw, sir."

"Only the glass?"

"That's quite right, sir."

"And no one else took anything to Mr. Wissenden?"

"Certainly not, sir."

"Thanks, that's all."

The butler departed. Reggie turned to the chief constable with a slow, benign smile. "No one took him anything. And yet there was paper all ready for him to write his last words. That's very interesting."

But again the chief constable didn't know what he meant.

"No. It's a very curious case, major. And poor Dr. Birtwistle's gettin' very tired. Good-bye."

"Anything you'd like me to take up, Fortune?"

"Oh no, no. No rash haste. I'll let you know when I want you to take anyone up. Good-bye."

Reggie escaped from him to find Dr. Birtwistle wandering, quite happy, among the delphiniums. "Sorry to keep you. Not a nice business. Let's go home. Tea is strongly indicated. Ample meditative tea."

"My dear Fortune, by all means." Dr. Birtwistle beamed and bustled. "I'm afraid you found the major rather trying."

"Not so much a major as a sergeant-major," said Reggie pensively. "Yes. A wearing day. Take me home to my tea."

The little car moved in slow time down the winding drive, stopped, hooted long and turned into the road. Still Dr. Birtwistle drove at the pace of a perambulator and Reggie sighed and sighed again. "I'm afraid this is anxious work for you, Fortune," the old doctor said.

"Yes, yes. Life is short," Mr. Fortune murmured.

Another car blared impatience behind. The doctor turned, saluted, waved it on and drew aside.

It came carefully, it seemed to know Dr. Birtwistle's driving. "Doing the Jehu act again, doctor?" The young man in it grinned. "Your busy day, what?" He shot ahead.

"A rascal," said Dr. Birtwistle. "He will have his joke at me. It's Leary, our veterinary surgeon."

Reggie sat up. "Oh, the vet," he said and looked back down the road. "Well, well. Stop at the post office, will you? I want to wire to my man to bring down some things."

"Oh, certainly; oh, of course. I can't tell you how glad I am you're here to take the case, Fortune."

"Yes. Somebody's in luck. Yes," Mr. Fortune murmured. "It would have come to me in the end, anyway. And then I might have missed everything."

Dr. Birtwistle was startled. Dr. Birtwistle began to talk. But he did it without help. Neither then nor afterwards on that evening would Mr. Fortune

discuss the case. He preferred the mysteries of horticulture.

On the next day, after much grim work, Dr. Birtwistle sat in the laboratory of the county hospital watching him manipulate chemical apparatus. He turned at last with a porcelain dish which contained a light yellow deposit. On this he poured a colourless fluid. The yellow matter became purple, violet, dark red and then vanished. "Yes. Quite so. One of the mydriatic family. Now the trouble begins, doctor."

Dr. Birtwistle, who was not familiar with the tests for alkaloid poisons, only went on looking frightened.

Mr. Fortune continued to manipulate potions, vessels, flames and as he worked he hummed a droning chantey. . . A sudden silence startled Dr. Birtwistle. "Well, well," said Mr. Fortune under his breath and made some calculations. . . . He went back to his flasks and beakers. . . . He was trying to dissolve something. "And that's that," he said at last. "Hyoscyamine."

"Are you quite satisfied now, Fortune?" Dr. Birtwistle's voice was low.

"Satisfied?" Mr. Fortune stared at him. "Oh my only aunt! No, doctor, not satisfied. But very interested." He put his materials away in a cupboard and locked it. "Let's go home to tea. The other little matter we can deal with in your nice house."

"The other matter?" Dr. Birtwistle was painfully surprised.

"Yes. Sam brought down a microscope. Only a chance," Mr. Fortune sighed. "Only a chance. What were those things you gave me for tea yesterday with the cream and jam? Splitters? Yes. I hope your housekeeper has some more splitters."

"You're a strange man, Fortune."

"My dear doctor! Oh, my dear doctor! Only human. Highly human."

The chief constable also showed some surprise when he came into Dr. Birtwistle's garden and found Mr. Fortune consuming bilberry jam and clotted cream upon a substructure of splitter. "Here you are, then! I've been looking for you at the hospital, Fortune."

"Your error," said Mr. Fortune with his mouth full.

"Taking it pretty easy, aren't you?"

"No. No. The mind is not inactive. Much thought is required. Another splitter would do me no harm, doctor. Yes, a lot of thought. So many hypotheses are possible."

"Damme, sir, haven't you found out yet how he was killed?"

"Oh that. Oh yes. There's no doubt about that. Mr. Wissenden was killed by hyoscyamine."

"What's that?"

"An alkaloid of the atropine group. It acts upon the heart. Sometimes used in small doses as a heart stimulant. He had a large dose. A very large dose." Reggie contemplated the major with dreamy wonder. "Funny thing. You can kill with an eighth of a grain of hyoscyamine. He had a lot. It's an out-of-the-way poison. Whoever thought of hyoscyamine must have known something. And yet a great big dose was used. That's very odd, major."

"What's it matter?"

"Well, it's very interesting. I could have sworn he was killed by a poison of the atropine group if he'd taken only a fraction of what he did take. I couldn't have sworn to hyoscyamine unless a big dose had been used."

"Somebody meant to make sure of killing him, that's all."

"Somebody meant to make sure," Reggie said and stopped. "Yes. That is indicated."

"How was the stuff given him?"

"It was in that glass of barley-water."

"Ha. That's Miss Dean right enough. What a fiend of a woman!"

"My God!" Dr. Birtwistle gasped. "That poor lonely girl."

The chief constable snorted. "Poor lonely devil, doctor. What about poor Wissenden that she murdered?"

"I can't believe it!" Dr. Birtwistle said faintly and wiped his eyes.

The chief constable laughed. "He'll believe it all right, won't he, Fortune?"

"I wonder," said Mr. Fortune. "You haven't got your case yet, major. How did a big dose of hyoscyamine get to Wissenden's house? It isn't stuff you buy at the grocer's."

"You mean she'd have to sign the poison book at a chemist's?"

"Yes. Even then I shouldn't expect a chemist to sell it without a prescription."

"It's stuff doctors do prescribe, is it?"

"Some doctors might. For a chap with a queer heart. Wissenden's heart wasn't queer. Very interesting case."

"I'll go through our chemists with a small tooth comb." The chief constable stood up. "Anything else, Fortune?"

"Yes. Have you heard from Wissenden's solicitor?"

The chief constable laughed. "Don't you worry. He's right on it. He's coming down. He's wired to make an appointment with me to-morrow, two-thirty."

"I shall be there," said Mr. Fortune.

"Right. I dare say I'll have something to tell you about Miss Dean's chemist." He marched off.

Reggie Fortune lay back and looked at the clotted cream and sighed.

"Fortune," said a small miserable voice, "Fortune, do you believe that poor girl killed the man?"

"I don't believe anything," said Mr. Fortune. "I don't believe anybody."

"You saw her, didn't you?"

"Yes. She didn't tell the truth. Not the whole truth. And she's deadly afraid."

"God help her!" said Dr. Birtwistle and after a little while spoke again eagerly. "Fortune, there's something has occurred to me—a point you haven't taken——"

Mr. Fortune sat up. "I wonder what that is," he said with some asperity.

"Well, you know, if there was such a large dose of hyoscyamine in that barley-water——"

"There was."

"But isn't it strange Wissenden didn't notice the taste?"

Mr. Fortune smiled: a slow, benign smile with which Dr. Birtwistle was unacquainted. It frightened him. "Yes. Speech for the defence. Good lawyer's point. Sort of thing to go down with a jury. There's only about twenty answers. Ever drunk when you were thirsty? You swallow without noticing the taste till afterwards. Barley-water would disguise the taste. We don't know whether Wissenden noticed tastes much. Lots of

old fellows don't. And he may have noticed something. He didn't finish the barley-water. There's some explanations. Believe which you like."

"But what do you believe, Fortune?"

"Oh, me. I don't believe anything. I told you." Mr. Fortune rose and went into the house.

Some time afterwards his head came out of his bedroom window and roused Dr. Birtwistle from melancholy meditation. Dr. Birtwistle went up to his room and found him standing beside a large microscope. "Have a look at that, doctor," he said. Dr. Birtwistle bent and looked. "What do you make of it?"

"Surely it's blood."

"Oh yes. It's blood all right. Whose blood?"

Dr. Birtwistle straightened his back and stared. "But how could one possibly tell, Fortune?" he cried.

"Nothing strike you about it?"

"No, I saw nothing unusual. It's very highly magnified, of course. This is a beautiful instrument."

Reggie sighed, took out the slide and put in another. "Now what about that?"

Dr. Birtwistle took more time over it. "Really, it looks to me much the same," he pronounced.

"Yes. I thought you'd say that. Blood from the same body, eh?"

"How can one tell?" Dr. Birtwistle protested. "I thought in the first slide the corpuscles were a little larger. But the difference seems very slight."

"It is," said Mr. Fortune. "You'd pass them both as human blood."

"I shouldn't have thought of doubting it," Dr. Birtwistle said slowly. "Do you, Fortune?"

"Oh Lord, yes. I doubt everything till I'm sure,"—he dropped into a chair,—"till I'm sure." He sat limp, his chin on his breast, his round face pale and troubled.

"My dear fellow, you're worn out. You're overdoing it," Dr. Birtwistle cried.

"No, no. I'm wondering what to do next. I don't want to make a mistake. I wouldn't trust a jury with this case."

"You want to save that poor girl?"

"I want to be sure," said Mr. Fortune and looked at him with dull, cold eyes.

The doctor shivered. "You're rather terrible, Fortune. For God's sake if you're not sure, let's have mercy."

"Mercy—that's not my department. I work for justice."

"But what has this blood to do with her?"

"It has to do with Wissenden's death. The first slide was the blood on the saxifrage. The second was the blood from Wissenden's head.

If the first blood is human, it ought not to be Wissenden's. If it's not human, what came and bled there while he was dying? Whatever it is, it means something happened about his death that we don't know."

"And you said that poor girl didn't tell all the truth!" the doctor cried.

"No. Not all. That's part of the case against her. I dare say the chief constable will have more soon."

"Fortune, what do you think that blood is?" Mr. Fortune did not answer. "Oh, I can see you think something."

"Lots of mammals have blood so much alike. It's very inconvenient. But I think it's dog's blood."

"Dog's!" Dr. Birtwistle cried. "But that's impossible! There was never a dog in the place. Wissenden hated them—hated all animals."

"Did he?" Mr. Fortune sank deeper in the chair. "He hated 'em, did he? He would. So that's that, doctor."

But when Dr. Birtwistle had gone, he went to the table again and examined under the microscope two long dark hairs and a little fluff. These things greatly interested him. When he put them away there was hardly time for a walk before dinner. Nevertheless he went out and the way he chose led him to the house of the veterinary surgeon. When he

went away, that facetious young man accompanied him to the gate with nervous deference.

He was late for dinner, of course. He ate it in an absent-minded way, very unlike himself, if Dr. Birtwistle had known. But the doctor was deep in melancholy.

In the morning Reggie's man Sam drove a large car to the door and Reggie explained that he was going in to the hospital to work out the analysis. "I'm no use to you, am I?" the old doctor said drearily.

"Well, it's my job. Don't worry."

"Fortune—you'll let me know if—if——?"

"Yes. You shall know. Good-bye."

So in the little laboratory the chief constable found him alone.

"Ha, Fortune! Still at it, eh?"

"Yes, yes. Takes time to work it all out."

"Anything new?"

"Oh no. There won't be."

"You bet there won't. It was hyoscyamine. That girl bought it."

"Well, well," Reggie murmured.

"Ah, that don't surprise you. Nor me either. She's a bold devil though. The day before the murder she was in Proddo's—they're the biggest chemists here—she said Wissenden had asked her to get some medicine for him and gave them a sealed envelope. Inside it was a prescription for

hyoscyamine. It seemed all in order. They made her sign the poison book and let her have the stuff."

"Yes. Who's the doctor that gave Wissenden a prescription for hyoscyamine?"

"They think the name was Wix."

"Wix," Mr. Fortune murmured. "Wix. I wonder."

"What is there in that? A chemist can't check doctor's signatures. She could have forged the prescription."

"Yes. It might be forged. Have you had a look for the hyoscyamine bottle?"

"At Wissenden's house, you mean? I've had my men search the whole place. They got nothing."

"Have you said anything to Miss Dean?"

"Not me," the chief constable laughed. "Not yet. I'm waiting for Wissenden's solicitor this afternoon. I like to have my case complete before I act."

"Yes, yes. It is better."

"Don't you worry. She's being watched. She can't break away. I'll be saying a few things to Miss Dean before long." The chief constable chuckled. "She'll have a lot to explain, won't she? She made a mistake when she thought she could try this game on with me."

"Yes. She's made a bad mistake," said Mr.

Fortune. "Solicitor at two-thirty, what? I shall be there." He got rid of the chief constable, but he did not go on with his analysis. He went to the post office and put in a trunk call to London.

From the telephone box he emerged dreamy and benign and ate a very large lunch, and still more somnolent, still more amiable of aspect, wandered into the room where the chief constable sat with a large, prim solicitor before him.

"Mr. Fortune! Then I was not mistaken," the solicitor said. "I inferred from your letter, major, that there were suspicious circumstances about Mr. Wissenden's sudden death. That is why I thought it right to lay before you certain facts about his will. I wish to say that I have no personal knowledge of the person concerned. I make this statement in the interests of justice and as a duty to my late client." He coughed and the chief constable said it .was very correct. "A month ago Mr. Wissenden called on me and gave instructions for a new will bequeathing all his property to Miss Lily Dean."

"Ha! I thought so!" The chief constable nodded.

"Only one month ago," said Reggie slowly.

"On June 16, Mr. Fortune. The will was signed on June 18."

"That's all right, Fortune," the chief constable cried. "That's what we wanted."

Slowly a smile came on Mr. Fortune's placid face. "Yes. That's what we wanted."

"There is something more, sir," the solicitor went on. "On the day of Mr. Wissenden's death I received a letter from him saying that facts had come to his knowledge about Miss Dean which would compel him to revoke his will. You will observe that this letter was written on one afternoon and on the next he was found dead."

"Now we have it!" the chief constable cried. "He told her he was going to cut her out of his will!"

"That of course is beyond my knowledge."

"Have you brought that letter?" said Reggie.

"Ah, yes. We want something in Wissenden's writing. I don't mind telling you——" The chief constable was stopped by Reggie's hand on his arm.

"We shall have something interesting to tell you to-night, sir," Reggie said. "May I have the letter?"

"Certainly, Mr. Fortune. Here it is. I will stay the night if you think it desirable. I am at the 'Woolpack.'"

When he was gone, "What the devil did you stop me for?" the chief constable cried. "There's no harm in his knowing what Wissenden wrote."

Reggie spread out the letter and the paper that was found in the garden. "There's no good," he said. "Wissenden wrote both."

"'The drink Lily Dean brought me.'" The chief constable laid his fingers on the words. "Ah, the devil! Thank God we've got her now."

Reggie sighed. "And the next thing, major?"

"I'm going over to ask Miss Lily Dean a few little questions, my lad."

Reggie put the papers in his pocket. "I shall be there," he said and went out, leaving the chief constable to snort at his manners.

The big car was swift. He sprang out as it stopped at Wissenden's door and Sam turned the car and drove off again. Reggie did not go into the house, he wandered round to the terrace where Wissenden had died.

There the chief constable's superintendent found him. "Hallo, sir! Who'd ha' thought of seeing you."

"Been keeping an eye on me, superintendent?"

"Keeping an eye on everything that goes on here, sir. Anything you want?"

"No, no." Reggie smiled. "I was wrong, superintendent. I said I'd got everything. I hadn't."

"Something you'd like me to look into, sir?"

"No, no. But it has interest."

"What's that, sir?"

"The lithospernum there."

"That blue flower? Looks rather seedy."

"Yes. That's what's interesting."

The superintendent puzzled over the plant and him and a car hooted. "Hallo! Who's that now?"

"That's your chief, I expect," said Reggie and went to meet him.

The chief constable was ringing the bell. "Got here already, have you?" he scowled. "Come in, superintendent. I shall want you. Ha, Hawken. Tell Miss Dean I am waiting for her in the library."

In that sombre room he arranged himself with the dignity of the judgment seat. Reggie strolled away to the window. When Miss Dean came in, a man came with her, a compact man with a chin and keen eyes. "You're the chief constable, sir? My name's Collingwood. Miss Dean is engaged to me. If you want to ask her anything, I must be with her."

"You'd better not interfere with me, Mr. Collingwood," the chief constable scowled.

"Captain Collingwood, please," Miss Dean said quickly.

The chief constable frowned at her. "Do you want to bring your fiancé into this?"

"I'm advising Miss Dean, thanks," Collingwood said. "I don't happen to care for threats."

"You don't know what you're in for. Have it your own way. I'm sorry for you."

"Thanks so much. Don't mind me. Unless you were meaning to be rude."

A gentle voice spoke from the window. "But it's very convenient to have you here, Captain Collingwood. You can tell the chief constable when you got engaged to Miss Dean."

"January 6. Twelfth Night."

"And Mr. Wissenden knew of the engagement then?"

"He did. I told him in the morning."

"Did he approve?"

"He did not. He was like a bear with a sore head."

"And he's been like that since January?"

"Ever since," the girl said quietly.

"Yes. That's what the chief constable didn't realize," Reggie murmured.

"Realize?" the chief constable exploded. "I knew it all the time. It all fits in."

"Oh my aunt!" Reggie murmured and gazed at him with melancholy amazement.

He roared on: "I didn't come here to ask about your engagement, Miss Dean. I want to know what you were doing at Proddo's the night before Mr. Wissenden was murdered."

"What's that? Murdered?" Collingwood took him up.

But the girl answered without a pause, "I went to Proddo's with a letter Mr. Wissenden gave me. He said it was a prescription from a London doctor. They gave me some medicine. I had to sign a book

for it. I came back and gave Mr. Wissenden the medicine and the prescription."

"Did you though? You didn't tell us all that before."

"Why should she?" Collingwood said.

"She didn't tell us till we found it out for ourselves. You knew all about it, did you?"

"I did. She told me as soon as I saw her."

"Did she tell you that medicine was a deadly poison?"

"How could she? She didn't know what it was."

The chief constable laughed. "She signed the poison book for it."

"You have to sign the poison book for a tonic."

"It was the poison Miss Dean bought that killed Wissenden."

The girl sat still as stone looking down at her lap.

"Ha! Not much surprised, are you?"

"If that's a question," said Collingwood quietly, "it's nonsense. If it's an insult, you're a coward. Anyway, you don't know your job. Miss Dean won't meet you again till you apologize. Come, Lil." He stood up.

"Don't you move," the chief constable cried. "I've given you a chance to explain yourself. Now I'm going to——"

"Oh no, no," said Reggie's gentle voice. "You haven't given anybody a chance. You're only bullying!"

"What the devil do you mean, sir?"

"You know you're not a sergeant-major. Not really. You only want to be."

"Damme, sir, I'll show you what I am."

"You have, you have," said Reggie with emotion and came away from the window smiling. The big car whirled up to the house and stopped with a grating of gravel. "Miss Wissenden," Reggie announced.

She came, a small plump woman in a hurry. "You sent for me, major?" She saw the others. "Oh dear me, what is all this?"

"I did no such thing, ma'am," the major gasped.

She sank breathless into a chair. "Not? But the young man said——" She gazed and shook.

"Miss Wissenden will now tell us," said Reggie, "exactly what happened when Mr. Wissenden died."

She looked at his placid face with swelling eyes. "I didn't know," she panted. "Oh dear, I really didn't know. However could you tell?"

"You came along the terrace with your Pekingese. It went up to Mr. Wissenden. He kicked it, hurt its mouth and broke two of its ribs. And then, Miss Wissenden——?"

"It wasn't Dodo's fault. Really it wasn't."

"If you want us to believe you, you must tell us everything."

"But I will really. I didn't know, oh I didn't

know. It wasn't Dodo's fault. I was walking in the garden. Of course Edward didn't like me to come, but I do so love it and Dodo loves it too. I used to try to keep out of Edward's way. But Dodo ran after a bird, a naughty, naughty girl, and I had to go after her. There was Edward sitting in his usual place on the terrace, but behaving so strangely. He had a glass and he was measuring something into it out of a bottle. Then he drank some and he laughed and got up and hid the bottle in the rockery and sat down again and began to write. That naughty Dodo wouldn't let me catch her. I had really to run after her. And she went up on the terrace and Edward saw her and saw me. Edward jumped up and he looked—oh so dreadfully. And I just said, 'Why, Edward, whatever are you doing?' and Dodo jumped up at him. Edward was always horrid about dogs. He kicked the poor darling brutally and I ran up to save my Dodo and he tried to kick her again and fell over into the rockery. I said, 'Well, that does serve you right, Edward,' and I picked up my poor Dodo, she was horribly hurt, and took her away home and sent for the vet. Such a nice, kind young man. He thinks Dodo will be quite all right."

"Good God, ma'am," the chief constable gasped, "you went off and left your brother lying there?"

"I didn't know. Of course I didn't know. I thought he had just fallen down. I was so shocked

when I heard. But you see it really wasn't Dodo's fault at all. Edward shouldn't have kicked her."

"No. He shouldn't have kicked her," Reggie smiled. "His error."

"My God, ma'am, do you know what you've told us?" the chief constable roared. "You're saying your brother poisoned himself."

"Poison? I don't know anything about poison." Miss Wissenden was bewildered. "Oh, do you mean he was putting poison in his glass? Was that it? How dreadful of Edward!"

"If that was poison then the bottle's out there in the rockery." The chief constable had an inspiration. "Superintendent!"

"Don't worry," said Reggie. "It was there. I found it," and he put on the table the bottle of tincture of hyoscyamine.

"You found it? And how the devil did you do that?"

"Well, it was the lithospernum. I thought the bottle would be about there. You see, I was sure he poisoned himself."

"Oh you were! First time you've said so."

"Yes. I wasn't sure till after lunch. Till the solicitor told us when he made his will."

"Why the devil should the man poison himself?"

Reggie sat down. "Yes. Why? Why did you leave your brother, Miss Wissenden?"

She gulped. "I—I didn't really. He drove me

out. Because I wouldn't do everything just as he wanted. I simply would not be a slave any more."

"Yes. Then he found Miss Dean. And he was quite happy with Miss Dean while she——" He looked at the girl and her lover.

"All right. Say it. While she was a slave," said Collingwood.

"Then you found her, captain. In January. He tried to stop that. He couldn't. In June he decided to kill her if he couldn't keep her. He was ready to kill himself to do it. He made a will, leaving everything to her. He went to a friend of his who was a doctor and talked to him about quick poisons."

"The fellow gave him a prescription," the chief constable cried.

"Oh no, he didn't. I rang up Wix this morning. He gave no prescription, of course. But he remembered Wissenden asking him about all sorts of alkaloid poisons. The prescription was forged. Wissenden wrote to his solicitor that he had quarrelled with Miss Dean and meant to revoke his will. There's the motive for murder provided and put on record. He sent her to buy the poison. He drank a huge dose in barley-water that she had brought him. There's the evidence. And if it hadn't been for Dodo, he'd have left a fine case against her for the chief constable to use."

"If it hadn't been for you," said Lily Dean in a low voice. She looked at him. She turned and felt for Collingwood's hand. She looked again at Mr. Fortune and her eyes were beautiful.

He came towards her. "All good things, my dear," he said gently. He turned and opened the door. "You don't want us any more. Good-bye."

She looked at him again as she went out, a very quiet lady. Collingwood gripped his hand. "Damn it, man, I don't even know your name," he muttered and was gone.

Then the chief constable, crimson and goggle-eyed, found his voice again: "Great heavens, Fortune, do you mean to tell me Wissenden committed suicide to get Miss Dean hanged."

"Don't mind me. Look at the facts."

"Because she was going to get married and leave him—he'd kill himself to kill her. My God!"

"Yes, yes. He's not the first," said Reggie, "but an ambitious fellow. It wasn't only her death he played for. There was going to be shame and misery for the man who loved her. Fine display of power."

"Edward was always very strange," said Miss Wissenden. "If you don't mind, I'll go back to poor Dodo."

THE LITTLE HOUSE

MRS. PEMBERTON always calls it providential. She is not the only one. But when he hears her say so Mr. Fortune looks at her with a certain envy. It is one of the few cases which have frightened him.

The hand of providence, Mrs. Pemberton is convinced, sent her to Mr. Fortune: and she only just caught him. He was, with reluctance, leaving his fire to go to Scotland Yard about the man who died in Kensington Gardens when her card was brought to him. "I was to tell you Mrs. Warnham sent her, sir," the parlourmaid explained.

Mr. Fortune went down to receive a little old lady dressed like Queen Victoria. She had a rosy round face and a lot of white hair. Her manner was not royal but very feminine. "Mr. Fortune! How good of you to help me! Mrs. Warnham said you would." She clasped his hands. "You were so beautiful with her."

"Mrs. Warnham is too kind——"

"You saved her dear boy's life."

"I hope it's nothing like that," said Mr. Fortune anxiously.

Mrs. Pemberton wiped her eyes and the white lilac on her black bonnet shook. "No, indeed. My darling Vivian is quite well. But she has lost her kitten, Mr. Fortune!"

Mr. Fortune controlled his emotions. "I'm so sorry. I'm afraid kittens aren't much in my way."

Her nice face looked distress. "I know. That's what I said to Mrs. Warnham. I told her you wouldn't want to be bothered with it, you would only laugh at me, like the police."

"But I'm not laughing," said Reggie.

"Please don't." Her nice voice was anxious. "She said I was to go and tell you I was really troubled and you would listen."

"She was quite right."

"I am dreadfully troubled." She wrung her little hands. "You see, it's the strange way it went and the people next door are so peculiar and I know the police don't take it seriously. The officer was quite civil and attentive, but he smiled, you know, Mr. Fortune, he just smiled at me."

"I know," said Reggie. "They do smile. I've felt it myself."

"Don't they," Mrs. Pemberton sighed. "Mrs. Warnham said you would understand."

"Yes. Yes. She's very kind. Perhaps if you began at the beginning."

Mrs. Pemberton had difficulty over that. Her nice mind worked on the theory that everybody knew

all about her. The facts when patiently extracted and put in order by Reggie took this shape. She was a widow, her only son was a general commanding in India. She lived in Elector's Gate, one of those streets of big Victorian houses by the park. Her granddaughter Vivian, aged six, had lately come to live with her and brought a grey Persian kitten. With care and pains a garden had been persuaded to bloom behind the house. There Vivian and her kitten were playing when the kitten went over the wall. Vivian scrambled up high enough to look over and saw it in the paved yard of the house next door, saw a little girl run out of that house, snatch up the kitten and run in again. Vivian called to her and was not answered. Vivian came weeping to Mrs. Pemberton. Mrs. Pemberton put on her bonnet and called at the house next door. She was told that nobody had been out at the back, no kitten had come in, they had no kitten, her granddaughter must have made a mistake. They were not at all nice about it.

"Who are they?" said Reggie.

It was Miss Cabot. Miss Cabot and her father lived there. She did not really know them, only to bow to. But they had been there quite a long while, a dozen years or more, very quiet people, perfect neighbours, never the least trouble till this dreadful thing. But of course Mrs. Pemberton couldn't let them take Vivian's kitten. She went

to the police station and complained. And the police wouldn't take it seriously at all.

Mr. Fortune, with her innocent blue eyes upon him, contrived to do that. It has been remarked by the envious that he has great success with old ladies. Mrs. Pemberton went away murmuring that he had been so kind. He was left wondering how long she would think so. It did not seem to him a case over which the police would be persuaded to lose much sleep. But it had points which occupied his mind as he drove down to Scotland Yard.

He was late for his appointment. "Ye gentlemen of England who sit at home at ease!" the Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department rebuked him. "This luncheon habit is growing on you, Fortune!" He pointed an accusing finger at Reggie's girth.

"It wasn't lunch," said Reggie with indignation. "I've had a most difficult and interestin' case."

Lomas sat up. "Difficult, was it? Come along then. Avery's full of ideas about it. What was the cause of death?"

Reggie stared at him. Reggie looked at Inspector Avery and murmured: "How are you?" Reggie stared again at Lomas. "Cause of death? Oh, ah. You mean the man found in Kensington Gardens."

"That is what I'm talking about," said Lomas

with some bitterness. "That happens to be what we're here for."

"Nothing in it. He died from exposure."

"Exposure, sir?" Inspector Avery was disappointed. "Just being out on a spring night?"

"Takin' the winds of March," Reggie shrugged. "He wasn't a good life. Badly nourished. Rotten heart. Nothing much good about him. Drug habits—and other errors. Who was he?"

"In the foreign restaurant business, sir. Lots of money. Quite a big man in his own line. Why he should go and lie down in the gardens to die beats me."

Reggie shrugged again. "He just got there and got no farther. No vitality in him. He'd go out at a breath."

"You said something about drugs, sir?"

"Oh, he wasn't drugged when he died. Probably he had run out of his dope and life wasn't worth living. And the night frost finished him."

Lomas lay back. "That clears him up, Avery. You can go home to tea."

But Inspector Avery was not satisfied. "Mr. Fortune was worried about something, sir?"

"Yes, yes. Most interesting case. Is Elector's Gate in your division?"

"That's right, sir."

"What do you know about Mrs. Pemberton's Persian kitten?"

Lomas put up his eyeglass. "My dear fellow!" he protested.

Inspector Avery also felt a shock to his dignity. "They don't come to me about kittens, sir."

"They come to me," said Reggie sadly. "It wasn't you that smiled, then?"

"Sir?"

"Mrs. Pemberton says she went to the station and they only smiled. Quite sweet but smiling. It hurts her."

"I do remember hearing talk of it," Inspector Avery admitted. "The lady was so pathetic. But they did the usual, sir, sent a sergeant round to the house where the kitten was supposed to have gone in. The lady there said they hadn't got it. Her little niece did try to catch it, but it got away. We couldn't do any more."

Reggie lit a cigar. "'Her little niece did try to catch it,'" he repeated slowly. "Now that's very interesting." He gazed at the puzzled inspector through smoke.

"It might be if I knew anything about it," Lomas grumbled. "Why this devotion to kittens, Reginald?"

So Reggie told him the story Mrs. Pemberton had told.

"Very, very sad," Lomas sighed. "But kittens will be cats. What do you want me to do? Leave a card with deep sympathy and regret?"

Reggie shook his head. "Not one of our good listeners," he said sadly. "Didn't you notice anything? You're not taking this seriously, Lomas. When Mrs. Pemberton called about the kitten, Miss Cabot said no one had been out at the back. When the police called, she said her little niece did try to catch it."

Lomas put up his eyeglass. "Aha! The case looks black indeed!" said he. "Miss Cabot didn't know about the little niece at first and found out afterwards. A deep, dark woman, Fortune," and he smiled.

"Yes. A facetious force, the police force," Reggie nodded. "That's what annoyed Mrs. Pemberton. And now do you mind thinking? A dear old lady calls very distressed and says Miss Cabot's little girl has caught her kitten and Miss Cabot says there wasn't any little girl and bundles her out. Why so curt? Because there was a little girl and there was a kitten." He turned on Inspector Avery. "Did your sergeant see the little girl?"

"No, sir. No occasion. He saw Miss Cabot, who was quite definite the kitten got away."

"Yes. Marked anxiety to know nothing about the kitten. Elusive little girl."

"My dear Reginald!" Lomas protested. "There're a dozen obvious explanations. The woman doesn't like cats. The little girl is a naughty little girl. The woman doesn't want to be bothered."

"No. She doesn't want to be bothered. That's what struck me."

"I fear your dear Mrs. Pemberton is a little fussy, Reginald."

"That isn't your complaint, Lomas," Reggie said sharply. "Well, well. Sorry I don't interest you." He nodded to Avery and went out.

Avery looked at Lomas with some concern. "That's all right," Lomas laughed. "Wonderful fellow. But he will see things that aren't there."

"I wish he'd been more interested in that death in the Gardens," said Avery sadly.

"Too ordinary, my dear fellow, too ordinary for Mr. Fortune."

"This kitten business rather put me off." Avery was thoughtful. "I suppose we did ought to have seen the little girl."

"Good gad!" said Lomas. "You run along home and have a nice quiet night. I don't want my inspectors seeing things."

But Inspector Avery did not go home. He had a conscience. He went back to the police station of his division. Mr. Fortune is not at Scotland Yard thought to resemble the prim little inspector. But he also has an active conscience. He went to Elector's Gate.

It is maintained by Superintendent Bell and others of his devoted admirers that he has a queer power of divining the people behind facts, a sort of sixth

sense. At this he would jeer. His own account of himself is that he is so ordinary that anything which isn't ordinary disturbs him. From the first he felt the vanishing of the kitten was queer. But the only credit he takes for the case, which they call one of his best, is that he brought to it a perfectly open mind. The rest was merely obedience to the rule of scientific inquiry, that one ought to try everything.

What there was to try in Elector's Gate, he had no notion. He left his car by the park and strolled down that majestically Victorian street. The range of stucco fronts was broken on one side by an opening which led to a dead wall. In this recess two little red brick houses faced each other, neat and prim, hiding behind the solemn mansions of the rest of Elector's Gate. At one corner of the opening stood Mrs. Pemberton's house. Then Miss Cabot's next door—Miss Cabot's was that little house behind it in the recess. Reggie rubbed his chin. So Miss Cabot did not live in the way suggested by an address in Elector's Gate. Quite a small place, a one or two servant house. Nice and quiet too. No traffic. No neighbours on one side. Retiring folk, the Cabots.

Reggie rang Mrs. Pemberton's bell. He had hardly been shown into her dowdy comfortable drawing-room when she hurried in crying: "Dear Mr. Fortune! But how good of you! Have you found out anything?"

"No. I came to see what I could find here."

"Oh, but I'm so glad! Such a queer thing has happened. Let me show you." She led him away into a little sitting-room and took from a drawer in the writing-table a piece of coarse blue paper. "Look! When I came back from you that was lying in the garden."

Reggie laid it on the table. It was a queer shape, it had a rough black line round the edges.

"You see! It's meant for a kitten!"

"Yes. It's meant for a kitten," said Reggie gravely. "Somebody drew a kitten on packing paper—with a piece of coal—and then tore the paper along the line—so as to make a paper kitten. Somebody who's not very old." He shivered a little. "Has your little granddaughter seen it?"

"No, Vivian was out when we found it. She has gone to a party. I was rather glad, you know. It seemed meant to tease her."

Reggie folded the paper and put it in his pocket-book. His round face was pale and angry.

"Oh, did you want to talk to her about it?" Mrs. Pemberton fluttered.

"I don't want anyone to talk to her about it."

"I'm so glad. Vivian is only six, you see, and——"

"And nobody but Vivian has ever seen the little girl next door?"

"Why no. I never thought of it like that. No,

indeed. We didn't know there was a little girl. Oh, but Mr. Fortune, I'm sure there was if Vivian said so."

"Did Vivian notice what she was like?"

"Poor child, she was so distressed," Mrs. Pemberton apologized for her. "She said it was a nasty, dirty little girl. Children will talk like that, you know, when they're upset. It doesn't mean anything."

Reggie did not answer. He walked to the window. Mrs. Pemberton's garden was a pleasant place of crazy paving and rock plants. The little house next door had a bare, paved yard.

"Oh, wouldn't you like to go out?" Mrs. Pemberton cried. "I could show you just where the paper fell."

"No, I won't go out." Reggie turned away. "Good-bye, Mrs. Pemberton. Don't let anyone talk to anybody. Don't let anybody know who I am. Don't let Vivian think about the business."

"Mr. Fortune! You mean there's something dreadful?"

"The worst of it for Vivian is that she's lost a kitten. There's nothing else to trouble you."

"But you're troubled about something."

"Yes, that's what I'm for," said Mr. Fortune. "Good-bye."

It was an hour which Lomas is wont to give to his club. He was before the smoking-room fire,

he was pronouncing the doom of the last new play, when Reggie looked round the door, caught his eye and vanished. Lomas went after him at leisure. He was in the hall, tapping an impatient foot. "My dear fellow, what's the matter? Has the kitten had foul play?"

"Come on," said Reggie.

Lomas came on with his usual studied jauntiness, to be thrust into a car and driven away at Reggie's side. "Why this stealthy haste, Reginald?" he protested. "Why thus abduct my blameless youth? Miserable man, where are you taking me?"

Mr. Fortune was not amused. "We're going to Avery's damned police station," he said. He spread out on his knee the blue paper. "That's why."

"Good gad!" Lomas groaned. "A kitten! An infant's effort at creating a kitten. Oh, my dear Reginald!"

"Yes. An infant's effort at creating a kitten," Reggie repeated. "Exactly that. That's what frightened me. It was flung over into Mrs. Pemberton's garden this afternoon."

"Tut, tut. Not quite nice. Designed, I fear, to harrow the feelings of the bereaved."

Reggie drew a long breath. "Do you mind not being funny?" he said in a low voice. "I'm scared."

"My dear fellow! Oh, my dear fellow! What on earth for?"

"For the child who made that." Reggie put it away again. "My God, don't you feel it? There's something devilish in that little house."

Lomas was shaken. Strong language is very rare on the lips of Reggie Fortune. "I can't say I feel anything," he said slowly. "What do you want to do?"

"See Avery about the people. Here we are."

Inspector Avery was still at the station. Inspector Avery showed no surprise at seeing them. "I told you to go home, young fellow," said Lomas.

"Yes, sir. I know. I was a bit worried about that kitten case."

"Oh, you were, were you? Mr. Fortune's got it very bad."

Avery's keen face turned to Reggie. "About the little girl, sir?" he said eagerly.

"Yes, yes. What do you know about the little girl?"

"Nobody knows anything. That's just it. It don't look right to my mind."

"No. It isn't right," said Reggie. "Send two men to watch the house."

"I've put one there, sir."

"The deuce you have!" Lomas exclaimed.

"Good. But we'll have two, please. One to follow if the child's taken away. One to stand by whatever happens. The constable on the beat must keep in touch with them."

"Right, sir. Just a moment." Avery went out with visible satisfaction to give the orders.

"You won't mind me, will you?" said the Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department with some bitterness. "But aren't you going rather fast, Fortune?"

"No. We're going far too slow."

"I can't let you commit the police to anything, you know."

"I know. You like a crime finished before you begin. Mr. Lomas, his theory of police work. Well, I've committed you to watching a suspected house. Ever heard of that being done before?"

Lomas, however, kept his temper. "You can have it watched, if it amuses you. But there's no reasonable ground for suspicion."

"Oh my aunt!" Reggie murmured.

Avery bustled in. "I've got that done, sir. Now is there anything else?"

"Yes, I'm not satisfied there's anything in it," said Lomas sharply. "What have you got against these people, Avery?"

"Mr. Lomas touches the spot," Reggie nodded. "Who are these people, Avery?"

"Ah, that's what I'd like to know," said Inspector Avery with relish. "Very retiring people, sir. Kind of secluded."

"Retiring be hanged," Lomas cried. "You've

nothing against them but this stuff about a kitten and a girl."

"Pretty queer stuff, isn't it, sir? Girl is seen taking a kitten, owner of the kitten is told nobody there saw it, we're told the girl did see it, like I said. But there's more to it than that. Nobody round there knew there was a little girl in that house, nobody's ever seen her, nobody's heard of her."

"Why should they?"

"Ever lived next door to a house with a child, Lomas?" said Reggie wearily. "You notice it. But Mrs. Pemberton lives next door and she didn't know there was a child in that house."

"Nobody knew. They won't hardly believe it," said Avery.

"How the deuce can you tell?"

Avery smiled. "The men get to know the servants in their beats, sir. I've had some inquiries made. That house, there's Miss Cabot, handsome lady not so young as she was, and her father and an old married couple o' servants very stand-offish. Been there a dozen years, living very quiet, never any guests and as for a child—well, the servants in Elector's Gate laugh at it. If there is a child, they keep her in the cupboard, one of 'em said. But there is, Miss Cabot owned up to her."

"There was a child," said Reggie gravely, and took out the blue paper kitten.

Inspector Avery gasped at it. "Kind of un-

canny, sir." He puzzled over it. "I don't know what to make of it, sir."

"There was a child in that little house wanted to create a kitten. She only had packing paper, she only had a bit of coal to draw with, she had no scissors to cut it out. This was the best she could do. She wanted to tell that other child next door something about her kitten. She threw this over the wall."

"I don't like it, sir."

"What's it all come to?" Lomas cried. "There's a lonely child playing tricks."

Reggie turned on him. "There's a child in that little house living a queer life. And the only paper she can get hold of came off a parcel. It happened to be a parcel of scientific apparatus."

"Are you sure about that, sir?" Avery cried eagerly.

"This is the sort of stuff they always use for glass." Reggie fingered it. "Look at the scrap of a label: 'ette & Co.' That's Burette's. First-class firm. What are the Cabots doing in that little house that they want glass from Burette's and keep a child shut up and squalid and miserable?"

"Squalid?" Lomas took up the word.

"The Pemberton child saw her. She was dirty."

"The house is kept as clean as a pin, they say," Avery frowned.

"Yes. Quite clean. And the hidden child is nasty and dirty."

"And they're at some scientific work. Do you think they're doing experiments on the child, sir?"

"I don't know. I don't know anything. But I'm frightened."

"We've got 'em all right, whatever their game is," Avery said fiercely.

"And the child?" Reggie murmured.

Lomas stood up. "You win," he said. "Sorry, Reginald. My error. Well, I haven't wasted much time. We'll go through with it now. First points to work on, who are the Cabots and what is it that Burette's send them? They're to be watched wherever they go, Avery—and their servants. I'll put Bell on to the case to-night. Report to him. We can deal with Burette's in half an hour in the morning. Anything else, Reginald?"

"Yes. You might find out if anybody lost a little girl some time ago."

Lomas shrugged. "We can look up the records. Rather an off-chance, isn't it? Whoever she is, they'd get hold of her quietly, these quiet people."

"Oh, it isn't ordinary kidnapping," Reggie said wearily. "I say, Avery, for God's sake don't let the Cabots know they're being watched. They might do the child in to-night."

"Good Lord, sir! No, I don't think it. If

they know they're watched they'd know they couldn't get away with a murder."

"We might not be able to prove murder. He's a man of science, Mr. Cabot is. Warn your men to be careful."

"We can't have a search-warrant on this evidence," Lomas frowned. "We can't do anything to-night. Begad, I'll have somebody get into the house in the morning."

"Yes, I'm going," said Reggie.

"My dear fellow!"

"You want a doctor to see that child."

That night lives in the memory of Mr. Fortune. He could not sleep. It is a condition otherwise unknown to him. He drove early to Scotland Yard and found Superintendent Bell fresh and hearty from a night watch.

"You've got something, Mr. Fortune. They're queer folk, these Cabots. Where do you think they went last night? Night club, if you please. The Doodah Club. Yes, the old man and the woman living in that quiet style, they go off to the Doodah which is about as hot as we've got. Well, as soon as I heard they were there, I sent round one of the night club experts. He knew the Cabots by sight right enough. They're pretty regular at the Doodah. He made out that Cabot is known there as Smithson and runs some sort of an accountant's business in Soho. Nothing on our books against

him. But we're looking into Smithson & Co., of course."

"Yes. Have you found anything about a lost child?"

Bell shook his head. "We've got no record of any to fit this little girl. Not many children get lost nowadays. I'm still looking about. But it's a bit of a long shot, sir."

"I know. And Burette's?"

"Harland's on that, sir. We'll know all about their end of the business before lunch."

"Now who's going with me to the house? I want some fellow with a nerve and lots of chat."

Superintendent Bell looked at him with solicitude. "Are you set on going yourself, sir? If you don't mind my saying so——"

"I do," Reggie smiled.

"Well, I knew you would," Bell sighed. "You can't do better than Avery, sir. He's a little bull-terrier."

"Yes. I thought that myself. But is he chatty?"

"He can keep it up. He's a politician."

"Oh my aunt!" said Reggie.

Some time later two men in the uniform of the inspectors of the Metropolitan Water Board strolled into Elector's Gate. A street sweeper asked one of them for a match and over his cigarette remarked: "All out but the woman servant.

Cabot and Miss Cabot went off together. The manservant's gone to the pub."

The water inspectors strolled on. "That's a bit of luck, sir," said Avery.

"No. That's Bell making a fuss down at Smithson & Co. I thought he would draw 'em. Your fellows said the manservant was in the pub till it closed. I thought he'd be on the doorstep when it opened—if master was out of the way. Now then. Lots of patter, please."

Avery rang the tradesmen's bell of the little house. After some minutes the side door opened to display a gaunt woman in black who scowled. Avery was sorry to trouble her, but they were going over the water fittings. She objected. Avery was very sorry, regular inspection, must go through with it, the law was the law. "Constable over there, mum, go and ask him if you like." They were admitted. "All the taps, please, then the run of the pipes, then the cistern. All fittings. Now then, where's the main?" He listened professionally. "Ah, I thought so. Just have a look at the scullery, mate. Now, mum, upstairs if you please." He swept her on before him, still talking about water and the law.

Reggie went into the kitchen, crossed to the scullery and turned on taps so that a noise of splashing water arose and came back to the kitchen. He called out, "Taps running, mate," and was an-

swered: "Right-o! Stand by the main," and heard Avery in continuous eloquence and the servant grumbling. He went swiftly from room to room, such rooms as upholsterers furnish to their own taste, and saw no child's gear nor any mark that a child would make. He could hear Avery moving about upstairs arguing about the lead of pipes and having doors opened. Avery was not missing anything. "Hallo, mate!" Avery called. "Try the main tap. Now up to the cistern if you please, mum." Talking, he climbed.

Reggie stood in the hall. There was a cupboard under the stairs. He opened that, saw darkness and in darkness the gleam of eyes. He went in. "My dear," he said gently. "What's your name?"

There was no answer but panting breath.

He switched on an electric torch and saw a little girl cowering in the corner. Her face was pinched and dirty, she seemed to have no body so she was huddled shrinking from him.

"I'm friends," said Reggie and reached for her hand. "It's all right." His fingers moved along the lean bare arm, about her neck. "Where's the kitten?"

Her face shook. "It died. It did. It's in the dust," she gasped.

"I'm friends," Reggie said again. "Wait: just wait. It's all right."

He shut off the torch and slipped out of the

cupboard. The feet of Avery were heavy on the stair.

"I say, mate. Waste pipes at the back," Reggie called.

"Have a look at 'em, Bill. Have a look at 'em," said Avery and held the gaunt woman in conversation in the hall.

Reggie went out to the paved yard. While he watched the scullery window his arm slid into the dustbin and brought out a bass basket. He buttoned that into his jacket and came back calling, "That's all right, mate. Shall I shut off the taps?"

"Shut 'em off, Bill. Come on. Good day, mum. Sorry to trouble you. Duty is duty."

The gaunt woman grumbling about a lot of fuss and nonsense slammed the door on them.

A chauffeur came out of the bonnet of his car as they passed him. "Watch it. Watch it," Avery muttered and hurried on. It was hard work to keep up with Reggie.

He made for a post office and telling Avery to get a taxi shut himself into the telephone box. "Superintendent Bell? Fortune speaking. What have you got about the Cabots? Somebody interviewing them at the Smithson & Co. Office? Let him keep 'em busy. Child in the house in danger of foul play. Yes. Death. Instant danger. I want a search-warrant quick. Right. At my

house." He joined Avery in the taxi and they drove away.

"No sign of the child, sir," Avery began. "But there was——"

"I saw the child," said Reggie. "She's still alive. I got the kitten too. He isn't." The bass basket was produced and from it the stiff cold body of a Persian kitten.

"Dead, eh? Looks all right too. Did it die natural, sir?"

Reggie pointed to the eyes. "No. Not natural. There isn't much natural in that house." He shivered.

"What did they want to kill it for?"

"What do they want to keep the child in a dark cupboard for?"

"Had her there when we came, I reckon."

"Yes. She's out sometimes. But she's used to the dark."

"The devils," said Avery heartily. "But what is the game, sir? Scientific experiments? There was a room I couldn't get into. The woman said the master had the key. But I made out it had water laid on."

"Yes. Laboratories have." The taxi turned into Wimpole Street and stopped. "You go on to the Yard and see Bell. I've got to look into the kitten." But he went first to the telephone and talked to his hospital and asked for a certain nurse.

He was in his own clothes again, he was eating lunch without appetite when Bell came. "Got the warrant?" He started up. "Good. Where are the Cabots?"

"I couldn't say for the moment, sir. Our fellows had orders to keep 'em talking as long as they could. But there wasn't anything much to go on. That business looks all right. They do accountants' work for the foreign restaurants."

"The man who died in Kensington Gardens," Reggie murmured.

"Good Lord, sir!" Bell stared. "He was in the restaurant trade, sure enough. And he was a drug fiend, you said."

"Come on, come on. I want to get back to that child before the Cabots."

But as soon as the car was moving Bell returned to his point. "About the drugs, sir. What did you make of the house this morning? Avery said there was a room might be a laboratory. Burette's say they've been supplying Mr. Cabot with laboratory glass ware for years."

"Yes. I think we shall find a laboratory. The kitten has been drugged. The little girl has been drugged."

"What's their game, sir? Some kind of scientific experiments with drugs?"

Reggie shuddered. "They've been making experiments. Not for science. For the devil. They

killed the kitten because she liked it. And she made her paper kitten to tell the other little girl it was gone. Silly, isn't it ? " He laughed nervously. " This car's damned slow, Bell."

" We're almost there, sir."

" Almost ! Nice word, almost ! My God ! "

" Steady, sir, steady." Bell laid an anxious hand on his arm. " I want you, you know. I'll ask for the child first."

The car swung into Elector's Gate and stopped just short of the recess in which the little house stood. As Bell sprang out a large man on the pavement met him. " Both of 'em drove straight here from the office, sir. Only just gone in."

Bell strode on to the house and rang and rang again. It was some while before the door moved. Then it opened only a little way and a man's flabby face with watery eyes looked round it. " I am a police officer. I have a warrant to enter this house." Bell pushed the door back and went in with Reggie and on their heels two large men followed. Silent and adroit they took the manservant and put him into the street where careful hands received him, and shut the door.

Bell stood still in the hall listening. There was a murmur of voices in one of the rooms. Its door opened. The gaunt woman came out. " Well ? " she said defiantly. " Who may you be ? "

The large men swept her aside. Bell and Reggie went into the room.

Two people were in it. A plump old man, neatly professional in his clothes, with a large brown face under his white hair, the face of a clever fellow who enjoyed his life, a woman darker than he, black-haired, black-browed, a woman on a large scale who might have been handsome before she was full-blown. She looked at them with gleaming eyes, and the lines were deep about her big mouth. She laughed, a shrill sound that began suddenly and suddenly ended.

"What is all this, gentlemen?" the man said.

"Mr. and Miss Cabot, alias Smithson?" Bell inquired.

"My name is Cabot and this is my daughter. The name of my firm is Smithson & Co. But you have the advantage of me."

"I am Superintendent Bell. I have a warrant to search your house."

"Very good of the police to take this interest in me. May I ask why?"

"I want the child you have here."

Mr. Cabot looked at his daughter. "Oh, our poor little darling," he said slowly.

"What's her name?" Bell snapped.

"I beg your pardon?" Mr. Cabot suddenly became aware of him. "Her name? Why Grace of course."

"Grace of course?"

"Grace Cabot, sir. I see that you don't know our family tragedy. My poor son's child is mentally defective. Practically imbecile. It has——"

"Since she came here or before?"

Mr. Cabot licked his lips. "I see that you have picked up some scandal. She was——"

"Where is she?"

"Oh, I'll find her for you," Miss Cabot cried.

But Reggie was at the door first. He went before her into the hall. Miss Cabot followed him and calling "Grace, Grace," ran upstairs.

A moment he stood, then pointed and one of the large men went heavily after her. Reggie moved to the cupboard under the stairs and unlocked it and looked into the dark. "I'm friends," he said very gently. "Come, dear. I'm friends." And above Miss Cabot's shrill voice called "Grace! Grace!"

He could see something faintly white. He heard a moan. "It's all over now," he said. "All right now. Friends, just friends."

"Grace! Grace!" the shrill voice came nearer.

"No, no, no," the child sobbed in the dark.

Reggie went in, groped for her and gathered her into his arms. She was very frail. "My dear," he whispered. She was carried out into the light, shaking, trying to hide into her dirty dress.

Miss Cabot ran down the stairs, "So you've found the dear creature!" she cried. Her arms shot out.

Reggie swung on his heel, offering her a solid shoulder. "Hold her wrist," he said.

The large man behind her had both arms in a grip that brought a scream out of her. A syringe fell tinkling to the floor. And Miss Cabot began to swear.

"Take the child out of this," Reggie said fiercely. "Take her to my place." But she nestled up against him and moaned. "All right. All right. Get the woman off." Handcuffs snapped upon Miss Cabot's wrists while she bit and struggled and blasphemed. She was thrust out to the ready hands in the street.

"A beauty, she is," one of the large men muttered.

And then silence came down upon the house. The child felt it, raised her wan starved face from Reggie's shoulder. "Is she gone?" she murmured, looked about her, saw nothing but those solid, comfortable men and listened again to the silence. "Weally, weally gone?"

"Really gone. She'll never hurt you any more," Reggie said. "There's only friends for you now. You're coming home with me. Nice home. But just wait a minute. This man will hold you quite safe." He persuaded her to go to the arms of one of the detectives. "Take her out into the air at the back. I shan't be long, dear."

He picked up the syringe carefully, he turned

into the room where Bell watched Cabot. The old man stood by the window looking out. His face was yellow. But he had control of his nerves and his voice. "Perhaps you will tell me what all this means, superintendent?" he was saying.

"You'll hear what it means all right," Bell growled.

"I see my daughter arrested——"

"Yes. She didn't like it, did she?" Reggie spoke to hurt.

The old man swung round. "Who is this person, pray?"

"That's Mr. Fortune."

"Oh, the great Mr. Fortune! Why trouble him with our poor affairs?"

"A pleasure," said Reggie.

"So happy to interest you! And will you be good enough to tell me why you have arrested my daughter?"

"We've found a child in your house who has been tortured."

"I suppose she told you so," the old man chuckled "Good evidence you have found, Mr. Fortune The child's an imbecile."

"We shan't use her evidence," said Reggie "You won't torture her any more, Mr. Cabot."

The old man grinned. "Is the child dead, sir?" Bell cried.

Reggie did not answer for a moment. He was

watching the old man's face. "No," he said slowly. "Oh no. Miss Cabot tried to kill her just now. But it didn't happen."

The old man was breathing hard. "A poor story, isn't it?" he sneered. "You won't make much of it in court, Mr. Fortune. Is that all, pray?"

"No. I should like to see your laboratory."

"My laboratory? Oh, that's too kind of you! A very humble little place where I play with chemical experiments. Do you really want to see it?"

"We're going to see it," said Bell.

"But I shall be delighted to show you."

Bell looked at Reggie who nodded. The old man went upstairs between them. He unlocked a door and they came into a room fitted with a long bench and shelves and sink and much chemical apparatus. Reggie moved to and fro looking at the array of bottles, opening cupboards. There were many things which interested him.

"Ah, do you like that?" The old man came forward as he lingered by an arrangement of flasks and glass tube. "It's a method of my own." He became technical, skilled fingers moved demonstrating. "And here,"—he turned away and opened a drawer and bent over it,—"here you see——"

"Yes. I see," said Reggie and caught the hand that was going to his mouth.

Bell took the old man in his solid grip. The hand was opened and produced a white pellet.

"Not that way, Mr. Cabot," said Reggie. "Not yet."

"You go where your daughter's gone," said Bell and called to the detective in the hall.

"I shall have some things to think of, gentlemen," the old man grinned as he was led away.

"You will. And plenty of time to think. In this world and the next," said Bell fiercely.

The old man laughed.

Reggie and Bell looked at each other and Reggie shivered and "Thank God," he said. He went to the window and leaned out to see the child with the big detective in the free air below.

"What was it the old scoundrel was doing here, sir? Kind of vivisecting the child?"

"Oh no, no. The little girl was a side line. He was making narcotic drugs—dope. Very neat plant."

"Turning out dope? He's been doing that for years?"

"Yes, yes. Prosperous industry."

"But why the child? For testing the drugs?"

"No. He wouldn't need her for tests. No. They drugged her for fun. You haven't got to the child's story yet. Lots of work to do yet."

"What did you want me to work on, sir?"

"Go over this place. Go over the Cabot's past. Go and look for somebody that's lost a child. Good-bye."

The big detective in the yard, nursing the little

girl with awkward gentleness, grinned embarrassment at Reggie. "I'm not much of a hand at this, sir. But she don't seem to like me to put her down."

"No. Nice to have somebody to hold on to, isn't it, shrimp?" Reggie touched her cheek. "Come and hold on to me." He held out his arms. For the first time he saw something like a smile on that pinched face. She swayed towards him. "Come along. We're going to a pretty house and a kind jolly lady and everybody there is waiting to love you."

She was wrapped in a rug in Superintendent Bell's car, she sat on Reggie's knee watching the trees in the park rush by, the busy, gay streets. Suddenly she clutched at him. "Is it weal?" she cried. "Weally weal?"

"Yes. It's all real now," Reggie said and put his hand over hers. "Jolly things, real things."

When the car stopped at his house, his parlourmaid had the door open before he reached it and watched him carry the child in with benign amusement which yielded to pity. "Shall I take her, sir?" she said eagerly.

"She's all right, thanks. Has Nurse Cary come?"

"Here I am, Mr. Fortune," a small buxom woman ran down the stairs. "Well!" She looked at the child. "I'm going to like you ever so much. Please like me."

It was difficult not to like those pretty pink and white cheeks, that kind voice. Again something like a smile came on the pinched, wan face.

"Oh, my dear," said Nurse Cary with tears in her voice and her eyes. She gave a glance at Mr. Fortune.

"Yes. I know," he said quickly.

"I'm going to make you so beautifully cosy," said Nurse Cary. "You just come and try." She took the child to her comfortable bosom.

Upstairs in the bathroom filthy clothes were stripped from the starved little body. But it was marked with something worse than dirt, punctured marks on the arms and here and there a rash. Nurse Cary looked at Mr. Fortune.

"Yes, I know," he said softly. "They've been giving her drugs"

"But why?"

"For fun."

"Devils," said Nurse Cary under her breath.

"Yes. I think so," said Mr. Fortune. He was handling the filthy clothes. They had been good honest stuff once. He looked close, made out a bit of tape with a name in stitched letters—Rose Harford. He turned to the child lying in the steaming water, Nurse Cary's hands busy upon her. "Well, isn't it jolly, Rose?"

"So you're Rose, are you?" Nurse Cary smiled. "My little Rose."

"Mummy's Wose," the child murmured.

Mr. Fortune went out. The telephone called to Scotland Yard. "Is that Lomas? Fortune speaking. The child is Rose Harford. There's a mother —or was. Get on to it."

. . . . . .

The small Rose in golden pyjamas was among many pillows watching Mr. Fortune and Nurse Cary set out a farm on her bed. They were being very funny about the hens, but she did not laugh, she watched with grave, tranquil eyes and sometimes stroked her beautiful pyjamas. Mr. Fortune was called away.

At Scotland Yard he found a conference, Lomas, Bell, Avery. "My dear fellow! How's the patient?"

"She'll come through with luck. But it's a long job. They've made a vile mess of her."

"Hanging's too good for that pair," Bell sighed. "And we can't even hang 'em."

"No, no. I hope not. They'll feel what they get, quite a lot, the family Cabot."

"They've done enough to be hanged more than once," said Avery fiercely. "You remember that fellow who died in Kensington Gardens, Mr. Fortune? He used to get his drugs from Smithson & Co."

"Yes. You were right about him, Avery. I ought to have seen there was something to work on there."

Avery laughed. "You're the one that's been right, sir. Do you remember how we made fun of you about the kitten? If you hadn't taken that up, the Cabots would be playing at hell now quite happy and comfortable."

"Don't recall my awful past, Avery," Lomas said. "It's not respectful. My dear Reginald, you're a disturbing fellow. You're sapping the foundations of the criminal courts of this country."

"No flowers, by request," Reggie murmured.

"You don't work by evidence, like a reasonable man."

"My only aunt!" Reggie was annoyed. "I use nothing but evidence. That's why I don't get on with lawyers and policemen. I believe evidence, Lomas, old thing. That's what bothers you."

"You do bother me. And now will you kindly tell me the whole history of the Cabot affair."

"Quite clear, isn't it? Cabot was a skilled chemist. The trouble in the dope trade is always to get supplies. He solved that by getting raw materials and making the stuff. He found his customers at the night clubs and the restaurants he was in touch with through the Smithson & Co. accountant business. He distributed probably by post from Smithson & Co."

"That's right, sir," Bell nodded. "We've got on the track of that now. Big trade he did. Lots of poor fools he must have sent to the devil."

"Very neat, Reginald," Lomas smiled. "You omit to explain the little girl."

"Oh, that's revenge. Revenge on somebody. Probably her father and mother."

"Did you get that out of the child?" said Lomas quickly.

"No. The child mustn't be asked anything about the past. Haven't you got that clear? No evidence from her. She mustn't come into court."

"My dear fellow, we don't want her. There's two of you to swear to attempted murder and your medical evidence. That's all right. I only wanted to know how you arrived at the mother."

"Have you found her at last?"

"Three months ago George and Rose Harford were convicted of dealing in drugs. The man is a young accountant, the woman an actress. They lived in a Bloomsbury flat and often went to one of the Soho restaurants. A waiter there gave information that the woman had been offering drugs. They were arrested. Dope was found in the pockets of the man's coat and the woman's cloak. More dope in their flat. A clear case and they were both convicted. Some time after they were in prison the woman complained that she had heard nothing of her daughter, whom another actress in the flats had promised to look after. Well, the prison people had inquiries made for her. It

took time. The actress had gone on tour. When they found her, her story was that Mrs. Harford's sister had called and taken the child away. The prison authorities told Mrs. Harford and she said she had no sister extant. So at last it worked round to us."

"Yes. At last. And you've had the mother in jail three months—wondering."

"Wondering if there was a God," said Bell solemnly.

"Well—it's a black business," Lomas shrugged. "See your way, Reginald?"

"Oh, I suppose the Cabot woman wanted George Harford herself. When he married, she looked for a chance to make the wife suffer. She bided her time. And sent father and mother to prison and took the child and tortured her. Patient woman."

"The Harfords have been out of England. The man had a job for his firm in France. They hadn't been back long before this happened to them."

"What evidence have you got?"

"That drunken dog of a manservant wants to turn King's evidence. He says he was under the thumb of his wife——"

"I dare say he was. Have you seen her? Born brute."

"His story is that his wife was turned on to plant the dope in the Harford flat. The waiter put the stuff in their coat pockets while they were at dinner. We can't lay our hands on the waiter.

Several people have vanished since the Cabots were taken. George Harford says he knew Miss Cabot at a night club, never knew her well, just danced with her. His wife had never seen her. Both of them always declared they knew nothing of the dope."

"Yes. Gross miscarriage of justice, Lomas."

"Clear case," Lomas shrugged. "Nobody's fault."

"Yes. That's very gratifying. Great consolation for the Harfords. Cheering for the child."

"We'll do all we can, of course. Put 'em right before the world, set 'em on their feet again and all that. An unfortunate affair. Shakes confidence in police work."

Mr. Fortune stared at him. Mr. Fortune drew a long breath. "Yes. That is one way of looking at it," he murmured.

"Thank God for the kitten, sir," Bell said.

Mr. Fortune turned large grave eyes on him. "Yes, that's another," he said.

"I'd call it all providential," Bell said earnestly. "Just providential."

Wonder grew in Mr. Fortune's eyes. "Providential!" he said. "Well, well."

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